MILDRED'S NEW DAUGHTER

BY

MARTHA FINLEY

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THE

MILDRED SERIES

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By MARTHA FINLEY
(Martha Farquharson)

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MILDRED'S NEW DAUGHTER

Mildred's New Daughter

By MARTHA FINLEY
(MARTHA FARQUHARSON)
Author of the Famous
ELSIE BOOKS

"A sweet, heartlifting cheerfulness,
Like springtime of the year,
Seemed ever on her steps to wait."
—*Mrs. Hale.*

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MILDRED'S NEW DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE clock on the mantel, striking six, woke Ethel and Blanche Eldon, two little sisters lying side by side in their pretty bed.

"Ah, it is morning, Blanche, and time for you and me to be up," said Ethel, smiling pleasantly into her younger sister's eyes.

"Yes; in a minute, Ethel," replied Blanche, turning toward her sister and patting her cheek affectionately.

At the same moment the door into the hall opened softly and the mother came in, her dark eyes shining, her thin, pale face wreathed in smiles.

"Good-morning, my darlings," she said, speaking softly, for fear of waking the two younger children in the nursery beyond. "Have you slept well?" she

asked, bending over to kiss first one, then the other.

"Yes, mamma, dear," they answered, speaking together. "And so have Harry and Nannette," added Ethel, "and they are sound asleep yet, I think."

"And we will not wake them," responded the mother.

"Did you sleep well, mamma? and is dear papa better?" asked the little girls with eager, anxious looks up into her face, Ethel adding, "Oh, I am sure of it, because you look so happy!"

"Yes, dears, I am very glad and happy, very thankful to our kind Heavenly Father, that your papa slept unusually well and seems easier and brighter this morning than I have seen him for weeks," Mrs. Eldon replied, with tears of joy shining in her eyes. "He has asked to see his children, and when you are dressed and have eaten your breakfast, you shall come to him for a few minutes."

"Oh, we are so glad we may see him, mamma," they cried in a breath, Ethel adding, "I hope papa will soon be so well that we can go back to our own dear

home again and see our own dear grandma and grandpa."

"Yes, I hope so, darling. And now you two may get up and when dressed help Harry and Nannette with their toilet."

"Then have our breakfast and after that go in to see papa?" exclaimed Blanche joyously. "And may we kiss him, mamma?"

"I think he will be able to kiss his children all around," the mother answered the little questioner, with a loving smile. "But I must go back to him now, dears," she added; and with another tender kiss she turned and went quickly from the room.

The two little girls were already out of bed and dressing as fast as they could; but that was not so very rapidly, for Ethel, the eldest, was only eight years old, Blanche nearly two years younger.

Their father had been ill for a long while, and it was now some days since they had seen him; their mother was his devoted nurse, with him almost constantly, so that of late the children had been left very much to themselves and

the companionship of the young girl, Myra, who combined in her person the calling of both child's-nurse and housemaid. Ethel was scarcely dressed when the little brother and sister woke and were heard demanding assistance with their dressing.

"Oh, hush, hush! do hush, children!" cried Ethel, running to them, "don't make such a noise. You forget that our dear papa is very sick and your noise may make him worse. I don't know where Myra is, but you may get up and I will help you to dress; then we will have breakfast, and after that we will go into dear papa's room; for mamma says we may."

"Oh! oh! can we, Ethel?" they asked in delight. "We're so glad! 'cause we haven't seen our dear papa for ever so long."

"And Nanny wants mamma to tum and dress her," whimpered Nannette.

"Oh, no, Nan, dear; mamma is too busy taking care of our poor sick papa, so I'll dress you and we'll have our breakfast, and then we are to go in to see him," returned Ethel. "Now be a dear, good

girl and don't cry," she added coaxingly; "because if dear papa should hear you it might make him worse. Now let me wash you and put on your clothes and brush your hair and then we'll have our breakfast."

The little maid worked away while she talked, dressing the baby sister, and little Blanche helped Harry with his toilet.

Before they had finished Myra came to their assistance.

"Your papa is better this morning, Miss Ethel," she said, "and your breakfast's ready now. Your mamma says you may go in to see the captain when you are done eatin', and then you are to have your morning walk."

"Oh, yes, we know," said Blanche; "mamma told us papa was better, and we're just as glad as can be."

"We hope he'll soon be quite, quite well," added Ethel, taking the hand of Nannette and leading the way to the breakfast room.

The four were quite merry over their porridge, feeling in excellent spirits because of the good news about their father, whom they dearly loved.

When all had finished their meal and been made tidy again, they were taken to him. He greeted them with a loving smile and a few low spoken words of endearment. Alas! he was still so ill as to be scarce able to lift his head from the pillow, and when each had had a few loving words and a tender kiss of fatherly affection, mamma bade them run away to their play, promising that they should come in again for a few minutes when papa felt able to see them.

She led them to the door and kissed each in turn, saying low and tenderly, "Mamma's own dear, dear children! no words can tell how mamma loves you all." The baby she kissed several times, holding her close as if loth to let her go. Setting her down at last with a heavy sigh, "Go, my darlings," she said, "and try to be quiet while you are in the house lest you disturb poor, dear papa."

With that she stepped back into the room again and softly closed the door.

Nannette was beginning to cry, "Nanny wants to go back to dear mamma and stay wis her," but Ethel put her arms about her, saying cheerily,

"There, there, little sister, don't cry; we are going to take a nice walk out in the green fields and gather flowers under the hedge-rows for our dear papa and mamma. Won't that be pleasant?"

"Oh yes, yes! I so glad!" cried the little one with sudden change of look and tone. "Put Nan's hat on dus now; dis minute."

"Yes, darling, we'll go and get it at once; and Blanche and Harry and I will put our hats on too, and oh, such a good time as we shall have!"

At that Nannette dried her eyes and began prattling delightedly about the flowers she hoped to gather, and the birds that would be singing in the tree-tops, or flying to and fro building their nests.

Harry and Blanche were scarcely less elated, and even staid little Ethel grew blithe and gay as they passed down the village street and turned aside into the green lanes and meadows.

The house grew very quiet when the children had gone. Captain Eldon had fallen into a doze and his devoted wife sat close by his side, one thin hand fast clasped in hers, while she almost held her breath

lest she should rouse him from that slumber which might prove the turning point in the long illness that had brought him to the very borders of the grave.

Mrs. Eldon was a West Indian from the island of Jamaica; and the captain, belonging to an English regiment stationed there, had won her heart, courted and married her. She was the only living child of a worthy couple, a wealthy planter and his wife, who had made no objection to their daughter's acceptance of the gallant British officer who had made himself agreeable to them as well as to her.

He proved a kind and indulgent husband. They were a devotedly attached couple and very happy during the first eight years of their married life; then Captain Eldon's health began to fail, the climate was pronounced most unfavorable by his medical adviser, and obtaining a furlough, he returned to his native land, taking wife and children with him; but the change had little effect; he rallied somewhat for a time, then he grew weaker and now had scarcely left his bed for weeks.

He had no near relatives living except two brothers, who had, years before, emigrated to America; he was too ill to seek old friends and acquaintances, and taking possession of a cottage advertised for rent, on the outskirts of a village and near the seashore, he, with his wife and little ones, had passed a secluded life there, seeing few visitors besides the physician who was in attendance.

Mrs. Eldon insisted on being her husband's sole nurse and determinedly persisted in believing in his final recovery, often talking hopefully of the time when they might return to her island home on the other side of the ocean, and the fond parents who were wearying of the prolonged absence of their only child and her little ones. But to-day as she sat with her eyes riveted upon his sleeping face and noted its haggard look—so thin, wan and marked with lines of suffering—her heart misgave her as never before. Was he—the light and joy of her life—about to pass away to that bourn whence no traveller returns? Oh, the anguish of that thought! how could life ever be endured without him? Her

heart almost stood still with terror and despair.

"Oh, my darling!" she moaned, as suddenly the sunken eyes opened and gazed mournfully into hers, "do not leave me! I cannot live without you," and as she spoke she pressed her hand upon her heart and gasped for breath.

His lips moved but no sound came from them, the fingers of the hand she held closed convulsively over hers, he drew a long sighing breath, and was gone.

The sound of a heavy fall brought the cook and housemaid running from the kitchen to find the captain dead and the new-made widow lying prone upon the floor by his bedside, apparently as lifeless as he.

"Dear, dear!" cried the cook, stooping over the prostrate form, "there don't seem to be a bit more life in her than in him. Take hold here with me, Myra, and we'll lift her to the couch yonder. Poor thing, poor thing! between nursin' and frettin' she's just about killed, and I shouldn't wonder if she wouldn't be long a-following o' him, if she hasn't done it already."

"Betty, I'm afraid she has!" sobbed the girl, "and what will the poor children do? She was just the sweetest lady I ever saw, so she was."

"There now, Myra, don't go on so, but run and bring somethin' to bring her to. Oh, there's the doctor's gig at the gate! Run and let him in, quick as you can go."

In another minute the doctor entered the room, followed by the sobbing Myra. He glanced first at the still form on the bed. "Yes, the poor gentleman has gone!" he said, sighing as he spoke; "but it is only what was to be expected."

He turned quickly to the couch where lay the still form of Mrs. Eldon, the face as pale and deathlike as that of the husband, laid his finger on her wrist, turned hastily, caught up a hand-glass lying on the bureau and held it to her lips for a moment, then laying it down with a sigh:

"She too is gone," he said in a low, moved tone, "and I am hardly surprised."

"Oh, sir, what ailed her?" sobbed Myra, "She scarce ever complained of being ill."

"No, but I knew she had heart trouble likely to carry her off should she be subjected to any great or sudden shock."

"And he's been took that suddent! and she so fond o' him," groaned Betty. "Well, well, well! we've all got to die, but when my time comes I 'ope I'll go a bit slower; that I do!"

The doctor was looking at his watch. "I must be going," he said, "for I have other patients needing attention; but I'll drive to the vicarage and ask Mrs. Rogers to come and oversee matters here. By the way, can either of you tell me where any relatives are to be found?"

"No, sir, that we can't," replied the cook, sighing heavily. "Leastways I don't remember so much as oncet hearing the capting nor Mrs. Eldon mention no relations 'cept it might be some o' her folks 'way acrost the sea somewheres."

"Too far away to be of any use in this extremity," muttered the physician meditatively. Then a little louder, "Well," he said, "I'll go for the vicar's wife, and she'll see to all the necessary arrangements. Where are the children?"

"Out walkin' in the fields, sir," an-

swered Myra. "Oh, dear, the poor little things! Whatever will they do? What's to become o' them without no father nor no mother?"

"I dare say there are relations somewhere," returned the doctor, then hurried out to his gig, and in another minute was driving rapidly in the direction of the parsonage.

Not far from the house he came upon the little group of children returning from their walk.

"Oh, doctor," cried Ethel, and perceiving that she wanted to speak to him, he reined in his horse for a moment, "have you been to our house? and did you find papa better? Oh, I hope—I think he is very much better, and will soon be well."

"Yes, my dear," returned the kind-hearted physician after a moment's pause, as if considering the question and the best reply to make. "I found him entirely free from the pain from which he has been so long suffering; and I am sure you and your little brother and sisters will be glad of it."

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir! just as glad as

we can be; as I am sure dear mamma must be."

The doctor drove on, sighing to himself, "Poor little orphans! I wonder what is to become of them. If I were only a rich man instead of a poor one with a family of my own to support—ah, well! I hope there are relatives somewhere who will see that they are clothed, fed, and educated."

CHAPTER II.

"Oh, papa is better, dear, dear papa!" cried Ethel, jumping and dancing in delight.

"Oh, I'm so glad! I'm so glad!" cried Blanche and Harry in chorus.

"I so blad! I so blad!" echoed Nannette. "But I don't want to doe home, Ethel; I'se tired."

"Then we'll go and sit down a while under the trees by the little brook over yonder," returned Ethel in soothing tones. "You will like that, Blanche and Harry, won't you?"

A ready assent was given, and all three turned aside and spent an hour or more in the pleasant spot, rolling on the grass, picking flowers, throwing them into the water, and watching them sail away out of sight.

At length Nannette began fretting. "I so tired, so s'eepy. Me wants to doe home see papa and mamma."

"So you shall, Nan. I want to see

them, too," returned Ethel, rising and taking her little sister's hand as she spoke. "Come, Blanche and Harry."

"Yes, I'm ready," said Harry, flinging the last pebble into the water. "I want to see papa and mamma; 'sides I'm hungry for my lunch."

"So am I," said Blanche, and they followed on behind Ethel and the baby sister, laughing and chatting merrily as they went.

Myra met the little party at the gate, her eyes red with weeping.

"O Myra, what's the matter?" asked Ethel in alarm.

"Never mind," returned the little maid evasively. "Your lunch is ready, and you'd best come and eat first thing, 'cause I know you must be hungry."

So saying she led the way into the house and on to the dining room.

They had come in with appetites sharpened by exercise in the open air, and were too busy satisfying them to indulge in much chatter. Nannette at length fell asleep in her chair and was carried to her bed by Myra, whither Harry presently followed her.

"Has mamma had her lunch yet, Myra?" asked Ethel.

Myra seemed not to have heard, and the question was repeated.

"No, miss," she replied, and Ethel noticed a suspicious tremble in her voice.

"O Myra, I hope mamma isn't sick," exclaimed the little girl. "She has been looking so pale of late!"

"She—she's lying down—asleep," Miss Ethel," Myra returned with difficulty, swallowing a lump in her throat and hurrying from the room.

"How oddly Myra acts! and she looks as if she'd been crying ever so long and hard," remarked Ethel, half to herself, half to Blanche.

But Blanche had thrown herself on the bed beside the two little ones, and was so nearly asleep that she scarcely heard or heeded.

Ethel seated herself in a large easy-chair by the window with a book in her hand; but all being so quiet within and without the house, she too, rather weary with the walk and sports of the morning, was presently wandering in the land of dreams.

She was roused from her slumber by someone bending over her and softly pressing a kiss upon her forehead. Her eyes opened and looked up into the kind face of Mrs. Rogers, the vicar's wife.

"Oh, I thought it was mamma!" exclaimed the little girl in a tone of keen disappointment.

"No, dear, but I kissed you for her—your dear mother," returned the lady with emotion.

"But why didn't mamma come herself?" asked Ethel, growing frightened though she could scarcely have told why. "You are very kind, Mrs. Rogers, but oh, I do want mamma! Can I go to her now?" She sprang to her feet as she spoke.

"My poor child, my poor dear little girl," the lady said tremulously, seating herself and drawing Ethel into her arms.

"Oh, ma'am, why do you say that?" queried Ethel in terror. "Is anything the matter with mamma? is papa worse? Oh, what shall I do? Can't I go to them now? I'll be very quiet and good."

"Oh, my child, my poor dear child, how shall I tell you!" cried the lady,

folding the little girl close in her arms, while great tears chased each other down her cheeks. "Your dear father has gone to his heavenly home, Ethel, and to the dear Saviour whom he loved and served while here upon earth."

"Do you mean that papa is dead?" almost shrieked Ethel. "Oh, oh, my papa, my dear papa!" and hiding her face in her hands she sobbed violently for a moment.

"But I must go to mamma!" she cried, dashing away her tears; "she will be wanting me to comfort her, for there's nobody else to do it now. Oh, let me go! I must!" as Mrs. Rogers held her fast.

"No, dear child," she said with emotion, "your mamma does not need you or any other earthly comforter now, for God Himself has wiped away all tears from her eyes and she will never know sin or sorrow or suffering any more."

A dazed look up into the lady's face was Ethel's only rejoinder for a moment, then she stammered, "I—I don't know what you mean, ma'am. I—I—mamma has taught me that it is only in heaven there is no sin or sorrow or pain."

"Yes, darling, and it is there she is now with the dear husband—your father—whom she so dearly loved!"

"Oh, you can't mean it! it can't be that both are gone, and nobody left to love us or take care of us—Blanche and Harry, and Nan and me! Oh, no, no, it can't be possible!" cried the little girl, covering her face with her hands and bursting into an agony of sobs and tears. "Mamma, mamma, mamma, oh, I can never, never, never do without you!"

Mrs. Rogers drew her closer and spoke in low, comforting tones, her own tears falling fast the while, "Dear child, God will take care of you and your little brother and sisters. He calls Himself the father of the fatherless. He pities and loves you and will raise up friends and helpers for you. Can you not trust Him for that, dear child, and be glad for papa and mamma, that they are safe with Him and will never again be sick or in pain? and that if you love and serve Him while on earth He will one day take you to be with Him and them?"

"I don't want to die, and I cannot, I

cannot do without my dear papa and mamma!" wailed the well-nigh heart-broken child.

Her cry waked the three younger ones; a trying scene ensued.

CHAPTER III.

To Ethel and Blanche the memories of the next few days seemed, through the rest of their lives, ever like a dreadful dream. Then they were taken on board an ocean steamer bound for the city of Philadelphia in the United States of America, where two brothers of their father had settled years before. They were merchants doing a large wholesale and retail business, and were known to be abundantly able to provide for the orphan children of their deceased brother.

The address of the parents of Mrs. Eldon was not known to those who made the arrangements, so that they were not even advised of their daughter's death.

There were no relatives to take charge of the forlorn little ones on their voyage, but they were given into the care of the wife of a soldier who was going out to join her husband in Canada, a Mrs. McDougal, a warm-hearted earnest Christian, child-

less herself, but with a heart full of love and tenderest sympathy for the sadly bereaved little ones committed to her care. She petted, soothed, comforted them, attended faithfully to all their physical needs, and spent many an hour amusing them with quaint stories of Scottish life and manners, of brownies, elves, and fairies; tales that would interest and amuse, yet teach no harmful lesson.

Before the good and gallant vessel had reached her destination the mutual love between the kind caretaker and her young charges had grown very strong, and it was with a heavy heart that Mrs. McDougal looked forward to the coming separation.

The announcement of the deaths of their brother and his wife, and that the children would be sent directly to them, had reached the firm of the Eldon Brothers only a few hours before the arrival of the vessel bringing them.

It was a great and not altogether welcome surprise, yet their hearts were moved with pity for the forlorn little ones, and together they repaired at once to the dock and boarded the newly arrived vessel in search of them.

They found them on the deck with their kind caretaker, Nannette on her lap, the others grouped about her.

"Ah, here they are! I'd know that little lad anywhere as poor Harry's boy!" exclaimed Mr. Albert Eldon, the younger of the two, with emotion, and laying a hand tenderly upon the child's head, as he spoke.

"That's my name, sir; and it was my papa's name too. Mamma called him that, but most folks said captain when they talked to him," volunteered the little fellow in return.

"Ah? then I'm your uncle Albert; and this gentleman," indicating his brother, "is your uncle George."

"Oh I thought so for you resemble papa; at least as he was before he was taken so ill," Ethel said, lifting tearful eyes to the face of Mr. George Eldon.

"Do I, my dear? I believe there is said to be a strong family resemblance among us all," he returned. "At all events we are your father's brothers, and therefore own uncles to all of you little ones," he added, stooping to caress them in turn, as his brother was doing.

Then the gentlemen held a conversation with Mrs. McDougal in which—perceiving how loth the children were to be separated from her, clinging to her with tears and entreaties that she would not leave them—they proposed that she should remain in charge of them for a few days or weeks while they were becoming familiar with their new surroundings.

She replied that she could do so for only a day or two, as she must embrace the first opportunity to rejoin her husband.

"I am sorry to hear that," returned Mr. Albert Eldon, "but do us the favor to stay while you can; and let it be at my house; for we will not try separating these little folks while you are with them, whatever arrangement we may decide upon later. Will not that be the better plan, brother?"

"For the present—till we have time to talk the matter over with our wives? Yes, I think so."

A carriage was waiting on the wharf, in which Mrs. McDougal and the children were presently bestowed, Mr. Albert

Eldon following, after a moment's low-toned chat with his brother and an order to the driver. He seated himself and took Harry on his knee.

"Where are we doin' now?" asked Nannette, peering out of the window as the vehicle moved on.

"To my house—Uncle Albert's house, little one," replied Mr. Eldon in pleasant tones. "You will find some little cousins, a girl and a boy, and I hope have nice times playing with them."

"What's the boy's name, Uncle Albert?" queried Harry.

"Charles Augustus; the little girl is Leonora; but they are usually called Gus and Lena, or Nora, for short."

"Are they all the children you have, uncle?" asked Ethel with shy look and tone.

"Oh, no," he replied; "there are Albert and Arabella, nearly grown up, and Olive and Minnie; Minnie is twelve and Olive fourteen."

"Has dey dot a papa and mamma?" asked Nannette.

"Yes; your Aunt Augusta is their mamma and I am their papa."

"And we haven't any; our papa and mamma both went away to heaven," sighed Blanche.

"Where they are very, very happy, dear child," returned her uncle, laying a hand tenderly on her head as she sat by his side.

Then he called their attention to something passing in the street, and exerted himself to amuse them in various ways till the carriage drew up in front of a spacious dwelling.

"Ah, here we are," he said, throwing open the door, alighting and handing them out one after the other.

"Why, who in the world can they be? And what is papa bringing them here for?" exclaimed a little girl, leaning out from an upper window and scanning with eager curiosity the new arrivals whom her father was marshalling up the front door steps, and at once admitted to the hall with his dead-latch key.

"What's that? More company coming, Min?" queried another voice, and Olive's head appeared beside that of her sister, just as the hack in which the little party had arrived turned and drove away.

"Pooh! nobody of any consequence; they came in a hired hack."

"But they were children—except one woman—their nurse, I suppose; and papa with them! There, I hear them coming up the stairs now, and I mean to find out all about it," and with the words Minnie threw down her books and ran from the room, Olive following close at her heels.

They heard their father's voice coming from the nursery, and rushed in there, asking breathlessly:

"Papa, whom have you got here? And what did you bring them for?"

"These children are your little cousins," he answered pleasantly. "Come and speak to them, all of you. They are the children of your Uncle Henry, of whom you have often heard me speak. Ethel, here, Charles Augustus, is just about your age, and Blanche might be Lena's twin; Harry is two years younger, and Nannette, a baby girl, the youngest of all."

The greetings over:

"But, papa, where are Uncle Harry and —and their mother?" asked Minnie, more than half regretting her query as she saw the tears gathering in Ethel's eyes.

"In heaven, I trust," her father replied in low and not unmoved tones. "There, my dears, do what you can to make your cousins comfortable and happy, I must go and speak to your mamma." So saying he left the room.

Mrs. Eldon, lying on the sofa in her dressing room, looked up in mild surprise as her husband entered.

"Why, Albert," she said, closing her book with a yawn, "what fortunate circumstance brings you home at this unusual hour?" Then as he drew nearer: "What is it, my dear? Why, actually, there are tears in your eyes. Oh," half starting up, "is there anything wrong with Albert or——"

"No," he said huskily, "but bad news from England reached us this morning. My brother Henry is no more; he and his wife died within a few minutes of each other. She had heart disease, we are told, was strongly attached to him, worn out with long and arduous nursing, and the shock of his decease was more than her enfeebled frame could bear."

"How very sad! I am really sorry for

you, my dear. And they left some children, did they not?"

"Yes, four little ones—a boy and three girls, the eldest only about eight years of age. They have grandparents, probably very well to do, somewhere in the West Indies, but no one knows their name or address. So the little orphans have been sent to us. The steamship came in this morning, only a few hours after the letter was received telling us all this, and which was forwarded by a vessel bound to a Canadian port but delayed somewhat in her voyage, so that, starting some days before the other, she reached port only a day or two ahead of her."

"And you are going down to the vessel to get the children?"

"No; we went down—George and I—at once on learning that she was in, found the little folks there all right, and I have just brought them home with me."

"But surely we are not to be expected to keep the whole four? Surely George and his wife will take two, as they have the same right as we to be at the expense and trouble."

"I think so, eventually; but just at present, while the poor little things feel themselves strangers in a strange place, it would be hard for them to be separated; so I have engaged to keep the whole for a few days," he replied; then seeing that she looked ill-pleased with the arrangement:

"But, I do not intend they shall be any trouble to you, my dear," he added hastily. "The woman who had charge of them on the voyage will remain with them for a few days, and except when they are taken out for air and exercise, they can be kept in the nursery and adjoining rooms."

"Well," she sighed, returning to her book, "I suppose I may as well resign myself to the inevitable."

"Do you think it more than their nearest relatives should do for our children, were they so sorely bereaved?" he asked.

"No, I suppose not; but I have given my consent and what more would you ask?"

"Nothing more, Augusta, except that you will encourage our children to be kind

and considerate toward their orphan cousins."

"Really I know of no one but their father who would expect them to be anything else," she returned in a not particularly pleasant tone.

"I do not expect it," he said; "yet think it might be as well to call their attention to the fact that the little orphans are entitled to their kindly sympathy. But I am needed at my place of business and must return at once. Good-by till dinner time, my dear;" and with the last word he left the room.

"Dear me! as if we hadn't children enough of our own!" exclaimed Mrs. Eldon in a petulant tone, and impatiently tossing aside her book as the sound of her husband's footsteps died away in the distance. "Albert needn't talk as if they were to be no trouble to me. Who else is to do the shopping for their clothes, decide how they are to be made and find somebody to do the work? for of course if they don't look all right, people will talk and say we don't treat them as well as we do our own."

At that moment the patter of little feet

was heard in the hall without, the door opened and her youngest two came rushing in.

"Oh, mamma," they exclaimed half breathlessly, "papa has brought us some cousins, nice little things, and we like 'em and want you to see them too. Mayn't we bring 'em in here?"

"Oh, yes, if you will only be quiet. Will you never learn not to be so noisy?"

"Maybe some day when we're growed up like you and papa," said Nora. "Come, Gus, let's go and bring 'em," and away they ran, to return in a few moments leading Blanche and Harry and followed by the nurse carrying Nannette; Ethel keeping close at her side.

They were pretty, winsome looking children, and Mrs. Eldon was roused to something like interest. She sat up and took Nannette on her lap for a few minutes, spoke kindly to the others, and asked some questions in regard to their former homes and the voyage across the ocean.

Most of the replies came from Ethel, and her timid, retiring, yet ladylike manner found favor with her interrogator.

"You are a nice little girl," she said at

length, smoothing her hair caressingly and giving her a kiss, "and so are your sisters. I am pleased with Harry, also, for he seems a manly little fellow, and I hope you and my little folks will get along happily together while you stay. There, run back to the nursery now, all of you, for it is time for me to dress."

They all started to obey, but as they reached the door, "Oh, mamma," cried Charles Augustus, turning toward her again, "mayn't we go down to the yard? 'cause I want to show cousins the pups and rabbits."

"Yes, yes! anything if you will go and leave me in peace," she replied with some impatience.

"Come along then, Ethel and the rest of you," cried Charlie, leading the way.

CHAPTER IV.

The Eldon brothers lived in adjoining houses, large, handsome, and with more extensive grounds than are usually connected with a city residence; a low hedge separated those of the one from the other, and a gate in that gave to each household free access to both, which, by the way, was a convenience more esteemed by the brothers and their children than by the wives and mothers, who had few interests in common—Mrs. George Eldon occupying herself almost exclusively with home cares and economies and outside charities, while her sister-in-law was a butterfly of fashion, considering herself a martyr to social duties and leaving the care of house, children, and her husband's comfort to those who could be hired to attend to them. As a natural consequence each secretly despised and avoided the other.

When the brothers parted at the wharf that day, the elder one went immediately

to his place of business, where he found his wife waiting to speak with him in his private counting room.

"Ah," she said as he entered, "I am glad you have come at last; for I have been waiting here for at least a full hour. Where on earth have you been?"

"Out seeing to some very important business; a matter demanding immediate attention," he replied somewhat coldly.

"Something which your wife is not to know about, I presume?"

"I have not said so, nor have I the least intention to keep it secret from you. Let me read you this"—unfolding a letter as he spoke.

It was the one he had just received from England, telling of the decease of Captain and Mrs. Eldon, and the sending of their children to America. She listened in almost breathless surprise.

"You have hardly mentioned that brother for years, and I had almost forgotten his existence," she remarked as he refolded the letter and laid it aside.

"Too true," he responded with a heavy sigh, "and my heart reproaches me for

my neglect. Poor Harry! if he had left that climate sooner he might perhaps have lived to be an old man; lived to support and bring up his children himself; but now all that I can do is to help in that work."

"As if you hadn't family enough of your own!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"I have two, my brother Albert six; and I have quite as large an income as he."

"And a wife that doesn't spend the half that his does," she added drawing herself up with dignity.

"Quite true, and, therefore, I should take certainly not less than half the burden of providing for Harry's helpless little ones."

"No doubt you will do your full share," she said coldly, "and your wife will be expected to do more than hers in the way of seeing that the children are trained and taught, fed and clothed; things that such a butterfly of fashion as Mrs. Albert does not trouble her head about for her own offspring, and certainly would not for others."

"Well, my dear, fortunately for us we

will not be called upon to give an account for her sins of omission or commission; but I have heard you say, certainly more than once or twice, that you consider it a duty to care for the poor with purse, time, and effort; and surely relationship to your husband should not be looked upon as a bar to such ministrations on the part of his wife. My brother, I am happy to say, is more than willing to do his full share, and I certainly do not want him to do more."

He was magnanimous enough not to mention her orphan niece whom he was supporting and educating, and she had the grace to feel somewhat ashamed of her display of unwillingness to do a little for his fatherless and motherless nephew and nieces. But she did not condescend to say so much in words.

"Well, how soon are we to expect them?" she asked.

"They are already here," he replied, "and the errand from which I have just returned was to the vessel that brought them. Albert proposes to keep the whole four for a few days, till they have had time to become somewhat acquainted with

us, and parted with the good woman—the wife of a soldier in Canada—who had charge of them on the voyage."

"And after that?"

"We propose to make a division—each taking two; our wives, of course, having a vote as to which two each of them may prefer to take."

"And they have been already sent up to your brother's, I suppose? I wonder how Augusta likes it."

"Surely she can hardly be without some feeling of compassion for the sorely bereaved little ones," he returned with emotion.

"They are to be pitied," she said, her voice softening somewhat. "Well, I came for a little money to spend in doing good—helping some of the unfortunates in our midst. Can you spare it?"

"Certainly," he replied, opening his his purse and handing her a small roll of banknotes.

"Thank you," she said; "I'll see to it that your bounty is not wasted."

"I'm sure of it, Sarah; I never knew you to be wasteful."

She smiled at that, understanding it as

a well deserved compliment; then took a hasty leave, as she perceived that someone was at the door seeking an interview with Mr. Eldon.

"Well, it's a bad business," she sighed to herself as she hurried along the street; "as if it was not enough to be plagued with my own brother's child, I must have his too. And really there's no necessity for it; it would be a charity to pay somebody to take charge of the four, saving them the trial of being separated and helping the caretaker to make a living; decidedly I think it is a brilliant idea and that I shall have no difficulty in persuading Augusta to join me in insisting upon having it carried out."

Mrs. Augusta was in her dressing room, just completing her dinner toilet, when to her intense surprise a tap at her door was followed by the entrance of her sister-in-law.

"Ah, you had no idea it was I coming upon you so unceremoniously," remarked the caller with a grim smile, and seating herself without waiting to be invited; "but I came to have a bit of chat with you about this invasion of our homes

by uninvited young guests. I for one see no reason why we should be expected to take charge of them, our husbands being amply able to pay someone else to do so, someone who may be glad to add in that way to a meagre income."

"Why, Sarah, that's a brilliant idea! If only such a person—one whom George and Albert would be willing to trust—can be found," exclaimed Mrs. Augusta, her eyes sparkling with pleasure. "Have you anyone in mind?"

"Yes, I have thought of that poor Irish curate, Coote, who is so continually applying for help. Wasteful creatures he and his wife must be to need it so often, with never a chick or child of their own to support."

"I should think so; and I can't bear him—red-headed, pompous, dictatorial, domineering creature that he is! He should never have charge of a child of mine."

"Well, don't, I beg of you, be silly enough to say that to your husband or mine."

"Of course not; if they can't see for themselves, why should you or I enlighten

them? Still I do feel a little sorry at the thought of giving him a chance to domineer over those poor little orphans."

"Let them behave themselves and they will do fairly well, I have no doubt," returned Mrs. Sarah with a frown. "They must be taught to expect to support themselves from the time they can be made capable of doing so, and lessons in self-control and the endurance of some hardship will be a decided benefit to them."

"So we will endeavor to believe, at all events," laughed Mrs. Augusta.

Then they consulted together as to the best plan for approaching their husbands on the subject; and decided that their wisest course would be to say nothing at present, but wait till some trouble between the newcomers and their own children should so annoy the gentlemen that they would be ready to purchase peace at almost any price.

CHAPTER V.

THINGS went pretty smoothly with the little orphans while their friend Mrs. McDougal stayed. She managed to keep the peace between them and their cousins by soothing and petting her young charges and interesting all the occupants of the nursery with her fairy tales, her stories of Wallace, the Bruce, and Robin Hood and his merry men.

But all too soon came the day when she must leave Philadelphia and go to the husband who was wearying for his good wife; a sad, sad day to the poor little fatherless and motherless children! They clung to her until the last moment, and she had to tear herself away leaving the whole four weeping bitterly.

Their uncles were kind, but because of business cares seldom seen; the aunts took little notice of the young strangers, each being absorbed in her usual round of occupation, while the treatment of the cousins,

older and younger, varied with their varying moods—sometimes they were kind, disposed to pet and humor their forlorn little relatives, and again—without any apparent reason for a change—treated them with coldness and indifference.

That was hard to bear, and caused many a fit of home-sickness and bitter weeping for the loss of the dear father and mother whom they would never see more upon earth.

Ethel, who was, in spite of her tender years, a very womanly little girl, earnestly strove to act a mother's part to her younger sisters and little brother—soothing and comforting them in their griefs and seldom giving vent to her own except in the darkness and silence of night when none but God, her Heavenly Father, could see and know it. Her pillow was often wet with tears as she sobbed herself to sleep while pouring all her sorrows into His sympathizing ear, as both her mother and Mrs. McDougal had taught her to do, repeating to her again and again that command and precious promise, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me."

"Oh, if I could only find our dear grandpa and grandma," she sometimes said to herself; "they would love us as dear mamma and papa did, and take us home to live with them, and we would be, oh, so happy!"

Then she would comfort herself with the hope that perhaps some day they would be found, and she and her brother and sisters be taken to the sweet and lovely home she could remember as a half forgotten dream, where no one would think them in the way; but they would be loved and petted and made much of, instead of being barely tolerated as those of whose presence their entertainers would gladly be relieved.

But scarcely a week had elapsed after the departure of their beloved caretaker, Mrs. McDougal, when the little orphans were subjected to yet another trial in the removal of Blanche and Harry to the house of their uncle George and the custody of his cold-mannered, unsympathetic wife.

The enforced separation was a bitter thing to both themselves and the other two. But tears and cries brought only reproof and punishment; especially to

Harry, who proved, under the tyrannical rule of his uncle's wife, a very determined little rebel, bringing upon himself punishments so many and severe that to hear of them, as she did in one way and another, almost broke Ethel's heart.

She sorrowed for Blanche too, and for Nannette and herself; for their situation was only slightly better than that of their brother and sister.

Things grew worse and worse with all four until at length their uncles, wearied out with complaints from their wives and feeling that it was sad to have the children separated, began to talk of trying to find a good home for them elsewhere.

Then Mrs. George Eldon broached her idea that it would be a help to poor Mr. Coote if he and his wife were paid to take charge of the little orphans, and at the same time a pleasant change for the children, as the whole four could be together.

She did not add the information that she had already written privately to Coote, telling of her plan and advising him to casually call in upon her husband and his brother, speak of his cramped

circumstances and remark that he was thinking of trying to get a few boarding pupils to help himself and wife eke out their small income.

The uncles hesitated over Mrs. George's suggestion, but finally consented to let the experiment be tried, provided Coote and his wife might like to try it; or if not they, someone else likely to prove a suitable person could be found.

It seemed to them quite a providence when a day or two later Coote called at their place of business and made known his desire for just such an opportunity for increasing his meagre means, asking if they could recommend him to someone who had the guardianship of children in need of a good home where they would receive parental care and training.

The brothers exchanged glances of relief and pleasure.

"Yes, Mr. Coote," replied the elder Mr. Eldon, "we ourselves are wanting just such a home and caretaking for the orphan children of a deceased brother; four little ones—the eldest eight, the youngest about three years of age."

"Possible?" cried Coote, simulating

delighted surprise, laughing in a gleeful way and rubbing his hands together with a look of great satisfaction. "Well, sirs, you may rest assured that if committed to my care and that of my estimable wife they will not long miss their departed parents, and will be trained up in so godly a manner that they will no doubt be reunited to them in a better world."

"Not too soon, I hope," observed Mr. Albert dryly. "I desire them to live to years of maturity, becoming happy, honorable, and useful citizens of this free land which we have adopted as our own."

"Oh, certainly, sir," responded Coote, "and I'm thinking they'll be more likely to live and thrive in the wholesome air of the country town in which I am located than here in the city."

"I hope so indeed," said the elder Mr. Eldon; "but if we trust them to you and Mrs. Coote it must be with the distinct understanding that they are to be well fed and clothed, and to receive truly parental care and affection."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, sir," again responded Coote; "my wife and I will look

upon and treat the poor little orphans quite as if they were our own."

"Better, I trust, than some people treat their own," returned Mr. Eldon. "Well, sir, if my brother approves, we will, I think, give you an opportunity to show yourself a kind and wise guardian to these little ones who, as the offspring of our deceased brother, are very near and dear to us."

In reply Mr. Coote gave renewed assurances that he felt a great interest in the little orphans, and that he and his wife would be as father and mother to them, doing for them all that the best of parents could do.

The uncles then consented to put them in his care for an indefinite period, reserving the right to remove them if at any time they saw reason to be dissatisfied with the treatment they received.

"I certainly shall give you no occasion for it," remarked Coote suavely; "as I have said, my wife and I will be as tender and careful of the little darlings as though they were our own flesh and blood."

"How soon will you be ready for them?" asked Mr. George Eldon.

"At once, sir, at once. And if you please I should greatly prefer to take them with me on my return this afternoon. It would save me another trip to the city, and in my circumstances that expense would count."

"And since the change has to be made it would perhaps be as well to make it at once," remarked Mr. Eldon thoughtfully, adding, "I hope the poor little creatures may be happier with you, Mr. Coote, than they have been with us, if only for the simple reason that the whole four will be together; for I never saw children fonder of each other than they are."

"Nor I," assented his brother; "and Ethel, young as she is, seems very like a mother to Harry and Nannette, poor child! I am really sorry to part with her. I'll go up with you, Coote, explain matters to her, bid good-by to the whole four, and see them off."

Things had gone very wrong that morning with Blanche and Harry, and Ethel was nearly heartbroken over the sore punishment meted out to them by Mrs. George. That made the news her Uncle Albert brought her much less distressing

than it would otherwise have been; for how, she asked herself, was it possible things could go worse anywhere than here? And it seemed a blessing indeed that she and all three of the younger ones would be together again.

She loved Uncle Albert, clung tearfully to him for a moment when he had told her of the new arrangement, then almost cheerfully gathered together the few small possessions of herself, brother, and sisters.

By direction of the aunts the children's trunk had been already packed with the most of their clothing, so that it was the work of but a few minutes to get everything in readiness for their hasty departure.

The little ones were almost dazed by the suddenness of the thing, and scarcely realized what had happened till they found themselves in the cars alone with their new and unknown guardian. Their Uncle Albert had gone with them to the train, and in bidding them good-by he laid a box of candies in Ethel's lap, saying, "That is for you and your brother and sisters to eat on the way;" and be-

stowed a large, luscious orange on each of the four.

Ethel threw her arms about his neck and held him tight for a moment, while her sobs came thick and fast.

"Oh, Uncle, dear Uncle Albert," she cried chokingly, "won't I ever see you any more?"

"Yes, yes, dear child," he said soothingly, "I shall run up to look at you and the others one of these days, when business grows slack; and perhaps—who knows but you'll be back with us again some day? But there, I must go now. Be good children, all of you, and Uncle Albert won't forget you at Christmas time."

And with a hasty caress bestowed on each of the others he hurried from the car.

Ethel dried her eyes, opened the box, gave a bit of the candy to each of the other three, then seeing that Mr. Coote was eying them as though he too would like a share, she held out her box to him, asking timidly, "Will you have a piece too, sir?"

His only reply was to seize the box,

help himself to half its contents, then hand it back with a gruff, "Candy isn't at all good for children, and if your uncle had consulted me he wouldn't have wasted his money buying it for you."

"Oh, dear, that man's got most all of our candy; and Uncle Albert said it was for us," wailed Harry, taking a peep into the half-emptied box.

"Be quiet, sir!" commanded Coote, turning a flushed and angry face upon the little boy.

"Give back that candy and I'll be quiet enough," returned Harry sturdily.

"What a hog of a man to be robbing those poor little children of their candy!" exclaimed a motherly-looking country woman in the next seat, apparently addressing her remark to a young girl at her side, but speaking loud enough for Coote and other near-by passengers to hear.

The train was just starting. Coote leaned over the back of the seat, bringing his mouth near to Harry's ear.

"You keep quiet, you young dog," he said savagely, "or I'll pitch you out the

window and let the train run over you and kill you."

"Oh, you wicked, wicked man!" cried Ethel, with a burst of tears, putting her arm round Harry and holding him close; "if you do you'll get hung for murder."

"Take care, miss; it wouldn't take long to send you after him," was the threatening rejoinder, and Coote leaned back in his seat again, took a newspaper from his pocket, and sat looking over it while devouring with evident enjoyment the candy of which he had robbed the children.

CHAPTER VI.

It was a lovely day early in October, and the children enjoyed gazing out upon the landscape, so new to them, the gorgeous coloring of the forest trees particularly attracting their attention. They were close together, having possession of a corner near the door of the car, where two seats at right angles gave them abundance of room to move about and gaze their fill, now on the outer world, now at the occupants of the seats near at hand. They were pretty quiet, and disturbed no one but each other with their prattle and fidgeting.

The sun was near its setting when they arrived at their destination. They were bundled very unceremoniously out of the car and hurried along the street by Mr. Coote, who seemed in hot haste to reach his parsonage, some two or three squares distant. Poor little Nannette found it very hard—indeed quite impossible—to

keep up with him in his rapid strides, though Ethel on one side and Blanche on the other were doing their utmost to help her along. And even they, without that hindrance, could not possibly have kept pace with their conductor. Nor could Harry, and he too fell behind with them, and all four were crying more or less when they reached the gate where Coote stood awaiting their coming, with a scowl of impatience upon his ugly features.

"I thought you were close behind me. You'll have to learn to walk faster. Dawdling along is something I'll not put up with," he growled, snatching Nannette up roughly and carrying her into the house, the others following in obedience to the gruff order, "Come along in, all o' you."

A middle-aged woman—tall, rawboned, of scowling countenance and stiffly starched in manner, stood waiting in the hall.

"So you've brought 'em," she said in icy tones. "Well, they'll make trouble and work enough, but the pay will help to eke out that starvation salary of yours."

"Take care, Sarah," he muttered, setting down the sobbing Nannette, none too gently, upon the floor, "little pitchers have big ears, and there's no knowing when or where they might blab."

"Just let me catch 'em at it and they'll not be apt to do it a second time," she said, turning upon the trembling little ones a look so angry and threatening that they clung together in affright, tears coursing down their cheeks and their young bosoms heaving with sobs.

"Stop your crying, every one of yov!" she commanded. "Come right in here and eat your suppers," opening a door near where she stood, "and then you shall go to bed. But no. Pull off your hats and coats first and hang them here on the rack in the hall. You must learn to wait on yourselves, and that there's a place for everything and everything must be in its place, and the sooner you learn it the better it 'll be for you; for dirt and disorder are never allowed in the house where I'm at the head of affairs. I'll help you this time, but you've got to help yourselves after this."

She had seized Nannette as she spoke,

and was jerking off her coat. "Well, I declare if you aint all sticky with candy!" she exclaimed, in a tone of disgust. "What on earth did you let her have it for, Coote?"

"'Twas none o' my doing," he replied; "their uncle gave it to 'em, but I can tell you it 'll be one while before they get any more."

At that Nannette looked up piteously, and with quivering lip, into Ethel's face, but did not dare to so much as whimper. It was a very faint and watery smile Ethel gave her in reply.

They were hurried into the dining room, a barely furnished apartment with whitewashed walls, green paper window blinds, and rag carpet; exquisitely neat and clean, but wearing like its mistress a cold and cheerless aspect in striking contrast with the beautiful homes of their uncles, which the children had left but a few hours before.

The table was covered with a very white and smoothly ironed but coarse cloth, and on it stood a pitcher of milk, a plate of bread, and four bowls of heavy ironstone china, each with a silver-plated

spoon beside it. The children were quickly seated, told to fold their hands and shut their eyes while repeating a short grace after Mrs. Coote. Then milk was poured into each bowl, a piece of bread laid beside it, and they were ordered to break the bread into the milk, take up their spoons and eat, which they did, Mrs. Coote seating herself opposite them and watching with eagle eyes every movement they made.

No one of the four ventured a word, much less to refuse obedience to the order given. Both bread and milk were sweet and good, and after the first taste the little folks ate with appetite, Mrs. Coote refilling the bowls and supplying the bread without stint.

"Eat all you want," she said in a slightly softened tone; "I was never one to starve man or beast; you'll not be fed on dainties here, but shall have all you can eat of good, wholesome victuals."

Presently the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall was followed by the opening of the door of the dining room, and Mr. Coote put in his head, saying: "Here's

the trunk, Sarah; what 'll you have done with it?"

"They'll sleep in the room over the kitchen; have it carried up there," she replied.

When the children had finished their meal, "Now," she said, "you shall go up to your room and beds," and they followed submissively as she led the way through the hall and up a back staircase.

The room into which she presently ushered them looked as scrupulously clean and orderly, and also as bare and desolate, as the dining room. There was a double bed which she told the little girls they were to occupy, and in another corner a cot bed which she said was for Harry. The remaining pieces of furniture were a washstand with bowl and pitcher, a chest of drawers with a small mirror over it, two wooden chairs of ordinary height and two little ones.

"Sit down on those chairs, every one of you, and keep still while I look out your night clothes from this trunk," said Mrs. Coote. "Where's the key?" looking at Ethel.

"In my pocket, ma'am," returned the little girl, producing it with all possible despatch. "The nurse told me she had put all our nightgowns right on top."

"Yes, here they are; looking well rumpled too. Plenty o' folks in this world that don't care whether they do a thing right or wrong. I hope you'll not make one of that sort, Ethel."

"I'll try not to, ma'am," replied the little girl meekly.

"Well, help your sisters and brother to undress, hang their clothes up neatly on those pegs along the wall there—so they'll get a good airing through the night—then undress yourself and do the same with your own clothes. Don't forget your prayers either. I'm going downstairs now, but I'll be in again presently to see that you are all snug and comfortable, and to finish unpacking your trunk." With these concluding words she hurried out, closing the door after her.

"Oh, me don't 'ike dis place; me wants to go home," sobbed Nannette.

"So do I," said Harry, tears rolling down his cheeks. Blanche too was crying, though softly, and Ethel's eyes were full

of tears. But she tried to be cheerful and brave.

"We'll make haste to bed and to sleep, and in the morning we'll all feel better," she said, trying to speak cheerfully. "Blanche and I will undress you little ones, then get undressed ourselves, and soon we'll all be in bed."

And so they were, Ethel last of all; the other three were asleep when at last her weary little head was laid upon its pillow. Her young heart was sad and sore, for it seemed a cheerless sort of home they had come to—oh, so different from that which had been theirs but a few short months before, with the dear parents whom she would see never again upon earth. With that thought in her mind she wept herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Coote were in the dining room, partaking of a much more elaborate meal than had been given to their young charges.

"Well, what do you think of them?" queried Coote, stirring and tasting his tea, then reaching for the sugar bowl and helping himself to another spoonful of its contents.

"I can tell more about that when I've had time to make their acquaintance," she answered dryly.

"The boy's an impudent little rascal," remarked her husband, reddening with anger as he spoke; then, in reply to her enquiring look, he went on to tell the story of the candy.

She listened in silence and with a look of growing contempt.

"Well, have you nothing to say?" he at length demanded in an irate tone.

"Nothing, except that if I was a man—

or called myself one—I'd be a little above robbing such a mite of a child of his sweets."

"No; in your great kindness of heart you'd prefer to let him make himself sick eating them," he retorted in a sarcastic tone.

"I think I'd as lief risk it for him as for myself," she returned significantly; "specially as the stuff had been given by the uncle to them, not to me."

"Young children haven't the same digestive powers that a hearty grown person has," he said rather angrily, "and I maintain that it was neither more nor less than an act of kindness to make away with some of the dangerous stuff by eating it myself." A slight, scornful laugh was the wife's only reply; then she began questioning him with regard to the amount to be paid them for the board, care, and education of the children. She was well pleased with his reply, for the terms offered by the uncles were liberal.

"They being so young, of course most of the care and labor will fall to your share, my dear," remarked Coote suavely.

"Oh, of course! when was it otherwise

with any of your undertakings?" she asked with withering sarcasm.

"Well, that's exactly what you should do. What was Eve made for but to be Adam's helpmeet?" he returned with an unpleasant laugh.

"Yes, a helpmeet, and that implies that he was to do his share. However, I expect and intend to do more than mine for these little orphans. They shall not be neglected if I can help it, and I'll keep them out of your way as much as I can; for their sakes as well as yours. They shall have their meals and be out of the way before we take ours. I'll not pamper them, but they shall have abundance of good, wholesome victuals. They shall be kept clean and neat too, comfortably dressed according to the weather, though I shall not pay much attention to finery and fashion. I don't expect to pet and fondle them—I haven't any of that motherly instinct—and I intend to bring them up to be neat and orderly, but they shall have their plays and fun too, for children need it; they can have their games in the garden in pleasant weather and in their own room when it storms."

"Very well; you may do as you like," he returned graciously. "I'm particularly pleased to hear that they are to be kept out of my way. Children are troublesome animals in my estimation; so the less I'm obliged to see of them the better."

"It's something to be thankful for that we've never had any of our own," she returned dryly. "Better for them and better for us."

Mrs. Coote had several domestic duties to attend to after the conclusion of the meal, and the children had been in bed fully an hour before she re-entered their room. She was careful to make no noise as she opened the door, came softly in, and lighted the gas.

Harry's breathing told that he was sleeping soundly. So were Blanche and Nannette. Ethel too slumbered, but with tears upon her pillow and her cheek, while at intervals her young bosom heaved with a long-drawn, sobbing sigh.

An emotion of pity stirred in the heart of the stern, cold-mannered woman as she looked and listened.

"Poor little thing! I dare say she

misses her dead father and mother," she sighed to herself as she turned away, "and she seems to try her prettiest to supply a mother's place to the younger ones. I don't believe I'll have any trouble with her, unless on account of the rest; but I'll do my duty by them all."

The unpacking of the children's trunk and re-arranging its contents in closet and drawers took but a few minutes, for Mrs. Coote was a rapid and energetic worker, a quiet one also, and the children slept on while she finished what she had come to do, then turned off the gas and went out, softly closing the door after her.

It was broad daylight when Ethel woke amid her new and strange surroundings, for a moment forgetting where she was. But only for a moment, then memory recalled the events of yesterday, and she knew that she and her little sisters and brother were strangers in a strange place.

Her little heart grew heavy with the thought; then recalling the teachings of her departed mother and Mrs. McDougal,

that God, her Heavenly Father, was everywhere present, as near to her in one place as in another, and ever ready to hear the cry for help, even from a little child, she slipped from the bed to the floor and, kneeling there, poured into His ear all her sorrows, fears, and desires; asking for help to be good, to do right always, and to know how to comfort and care for Nannette, Harry, and Blanche.

Having thus rolled her burden on the Lord she felt stronger and happier, and rising from her knees made haste with the duties of the toilet, then helped the others, who were now awake also, with theirs. She had just finished when the door opened and Mrs. Coote looked in.

"Ah, so you are all up, washed and dressed, I see," she remarked in a pleased tone. "That is right; and now you may come down to your breakfast."

With that she led the way, the children following.

They found hot baked potatoes, bread, butter, and milk awaiting them; all excellent of their kind, and they ate with relish.

"Don't you eat breakfast, ma'am?" asked Harry innocently.

"Of course," replied Mrs. Coote. "I had my breakfast along with my husband half an hour ago or more. Grown folks should always be served first, children afterward."

"Mamma and papa didn't do that way," remarked Harry, "'cept when papa was too sick to come to the table."

"But I like it best," said Blanche, with a timid glance at the stern face of Mrs. Coote.

"It's all the same to me whether you do or not," she returned in an icy tone. "I'm the one to decide what is best, and it's not my way to consult children's fancies. Now be quiet, all of you; don't waste time in talk or you'll not be ready for prayers when Mr. Coote comes in."

After prayers Ethel was directed to put their out-door garments upon her little brother and sisters and take them out to play in the yard, while she put in order the room they had occupied and made the beds. She obeyed promptly.

"Oh, children, don't for the world do any mischief," she said anxiously, when she had led them out and taken a hasty survey of their surroundings, "for you'd

be sure to get punished for it, and that would 'most break my heart. Don't go on the grass either till the sun dries up the dew, or you'll be sick, and oh, dear! what could I do for you then? And there's nobody here to be good to any of us."

"Don't be afraid, Ethel, we'll be good," said Blanche, "we won't get our feet wet and we won't meddle with the flowers or anything."

The other two made the same promise, and Ethel hurried back to the house, for Mrs. Coote's sharp voice was calling her in impatient tones.

"You'll have to learn to be quicker in your movements," she said as the little girl reached her side. "Come right upstairs now, and I'll show you how to make the beds properly and put the room to rights."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Ethel meekly, and at once set to work, doing her best to follow directions.

"Now notice and remember exactly how I want you to do everything, so that after this you can do it all without instruction or help," said Mrs. Coote, adding:

"you're none too young to learn to make yourself useful, and just as like as not you'll have to earn your own living all your days."

"Yes, ma'am, I mean to learn all I can," returned the little girl meekly, then sighed to herself: "Oh, if we could find our dear, kind grandma and grandpa, they would take care of us all, and have me learning lessons, 'stead of doing house-work while I'm such a little girl."

Mrs. Coote was very neat and particular and required everything done exactly in what she deemed the best manner, but when all was finished—the floor carefully swept, the beds made, the furniture dusted, she spoke a few words of praise which sounded very pleasant in Ethel's ears.

"Now," she added, "you can go out and play with the others. I approve of play for children when work's done, for —as the saying is—'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' I don't mean to be hard on you or the younger ones, and we won't begin lessons till next week."

"Thank you, ma'am; you're very kind,

and I'll try not to give you any trouble," returned Ethel gratefully. "I think I can make the bed and tidy the room by myself another time."

"I daresay, for you seem a bright, capable child," was the not ungracious rejoinder.

The ice of Mrs. Coote's manner seemed to be thawing under the influence of Ethel's patient efforts to please and to make herself useful.

Ethel hastened out into the grounds in search of her brother and sisters, for she had been feeling anxious about them, lest, without her care and oversight, they should get into mischief, or in some way incur the displeasure of Mrs. Coote.

They were all three at the dividing fence between the parsonage yard and that of the next neighbor. A prettily dressed and attractive looking little girl, about the age of Nannette, stood near by on the other side of the fence, and the four seemed to be making acquaintance.

"What oo name, little girl?" Nannette was asking as Ethel drew near.

"I'se Mary Keith. What all of you names?"

"I'se Nan, an' dis is Blanche nex' to me," was the reply.

"And I'm Harry, and here comes Ethel, our big sister," announced the little boy. "What made you stay away so long, Ethel?"

"I had to do some work. I've just finished," she answered; "but now I have leave to stay with you till we're called to our dinner."

Two ladies seated on the porch overlooking that part of the grounds were watching the little ones with interest.

"Who are they? I never saw any children there before; did you, Flora?" asked the elder one.

"No, mother, but Mrs. Coote's girl told ours that they are some orphan little ones whom the Cootes have taken to bring up. Poor little dears, they are very young to be both fatherless and motherless!"

"Yes, indeed! and they are very attractive looking children, too."

"So they are, and my heart aches for them, for there is nothing motherly in Mrs. Coote's looks or ways—nothing the least fatherly about him."

"Indeed, no! though he might perhaps have been different if they had been blessed with children of their own."

"Ah, Hannah is baking ginger snaps! How good they smell! Mary and her little new friends must have some;" and with the words Mrs. Keith rose and went into the house.

She returned presently with a heaping plateful, which she handed first to her mother Mrs. Weston, then carried out to the garden where she bestowed a liberal supply upon little Mary and her new friends. Mary introduced them.

"Mamma, dis little dirl is Nan; de boy is named Harry; he is Nan's bruver, and dose big dirls is Ethel and Blanche; dey's Nan's and Harry's big sisters."

"Not so very big, I think," said Mrs. Keith, smiling kindly upon them. "Where are you from, my dear?" addressing Ethel. "And have you come to stay here with Mr. and Mrs. Coote?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Ethel as clearly as she could speak, in spite of the lump rising in her throat; "our uncles in Philadelphia sent us here to be taught. They didn't say for how long, but Mr.

Coote told me we are to stay till we grow big enough to take care of ourselves."

"Well, dear, I hope you will be happy and prove pleasant playfellows for my little Mary," returned the lady kindly. "If you are the good children I take you for, I should be glad to have you with her a good deal, because it will be pleasant for her, and you, too, I hope."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Ethel, dropping a little courtesy, "thank you. It will be very pleasant for us, I'm sure, for she seems a dear little girl; so we will come sometimes, if Mrs. Coote will let us."

"Mayn't dey tum in now, mamma?" pleaded little Mary.

"Certainly, if Mrs. Coote says they may," replied her mother; then seeing Mrs. Coote near at hand she called to her and preferred the request.

"It's no matter to me if you like to be bothered with them," was the almost surly rejoinder. "To my way of thinking children are little else than a torment and pest, and I'm willing enough to have them out of my way if I know they're safe."

"As I think you may be pretty sure

they will be with us," returned Mrs. Keith in a slightly indignant tone, and with a glance of pity directed toward the young strangers. "Poor little orphans!" she added in a lower tone, "it will be really a pleasure to me if I can put some brightness into their lives."

The next two hours passed very delightfully to the little Eldons, playing with their young hostess about the garden and in the porch of her father's house, and making acquaintances with her mother, grandmother, and baby sister, her dollies and other toys, of which she possessed a goodly number.

In a kindly, sympathizing way Mrs. Weston questioned Ethel about her parents and her former home, and she was both greatly interested and much moved by the pathetic story told with the artless simplicity of a young and trustful child.

"My dear little girl," she said, softly stroking Ethel's hair when the tale had all been told, "truly I feel for you. It was a sad thing, indeed, to part so early from your dear parents, but God our Heavenly Father knows what is best for us, and loves His children more than any

earthly parents can. The Bible tells us that He is a Father of the fatherless, and He can never die, will never leave nor forsake those who put their trust in Him. Go to Him with all your sorrows, all your troubles and trials, and He will be sure to hear and help you."

Ethel listened with tears in her eyes. "I will, ma'am," she said; "I do tell Him all my troubles and my little brother's and sisters' troubles, too, and ask Him to help us, and I'm sure He does. But oh, ma'am, why did He take away our dear father and mother while we are so little and need them so badly?"

"Perhaps to teach you to keep very near to Him, loving and trusting Him instead of any earthly creature," the lady answered tenderly. "It is a grand lesson to learn; one that will make you better and happier all the days of your life. Jesus said to Peter, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but shalt know hereafter'; and I think he is saying the same to you, dear child. When we get home to heaven we shall see and know just why all our trials were sent us—just how necessary they were and that our kind,

wise Heavenly Father sent each one for our good."

"Yes, ma'am," returned the little girl thoughtfully, "I will try to remember it all and to be very patient and good."

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Weston had hardly finished what she was saying to Ethel when Mrs. Coote's harsh voice was heard summoning her young charges to their dinner. They hastened to obey, quite as much for fear that any delay would anger the woman and bring dire consequences upon themselves, as from a desire to satisfy their appetites.

The meal, like those that had preceded it, was plain but palatable, and the healthy little folks found it enjoyable.

"Now go out to your plays again," was Mrs. Coote's order when they had finished; "this is Saturday and I'm very busy, a great deal too busy to be tormented with a pack of children; so don't venture to come in again till you're called."

"Let's go back to that other house," proposed Harry, when they had obeyed

the order and were out upon the gravel walk leading to the front gate.

"Oh, no!" said Ethel, "don't you remember that our mamma used to tell us not to go too often to any of our neighbors' houses, because we would make them tired of us? There was a Bible text she used to repeat about it: 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.' We want them to love us and feel glad to see us when we go there; so we won't go very often when we're not invited. The grass is dry now on this side of the yard and we can have a nice time playing here together."

"Oh, yes," said Blanche, "we can play 'Pussy wants a corner.' That's good fun and we'll be careful not to run too hard and do mischief."

"And not to make too much noise," added Ethel; "we mustn't shout or laugh too loud, lest we vex Mrs. Coote."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Harry, "I do like to make a noise. I guess all boys do, and I do wish we didn't have to live where the folks want us to be quiet all the time."

"But we can't help it, Harry," sighed Ethel, "we will just have to try to be quiet and good all the time."

"Me will," assented Nannette; "I is doin' to be very dood."

"So'll I," said Harry, "but I don't like it a single bit."

They played several games; then Nannette began to cry. She was tired and sleepy. Mrs. Coote heard her, came to the door, and understanding what was the matter, bade Ethel take her little sister up to their own room and lay her on the bed.

"And when she wakes up," added Mrs. Coote, "it will be time for you all to have your Saturday bath; for everybody must be particularly clean for Sunday."

"Yes, ma'am," returned Ethel, "our own mamma always had us bathed on Saturday."

"In which she showed her sense," said Mrs. Coote. "Now hurry up to your room every one of you, and see if you can keep quiet there. You may as well all take a nap, for you have nothing better to do."

"There, there, don't cry, Nan dear; we'll soon get up to the top of these stairs and into our room," Ethel said in soothing tones, doing her utmost to help her baby sister in the weary task of climbing the rather steep flight of stairs that led to that desired haven.

"I so tired," sobbed Nan.

"Yes, dear; and these stairs are high for your poor little legs. But never mind; we're most up now. Ah, here we are, and you shall lie down and have oh! such a good sleep, with Blanche on one side and me on the other and Harry on his own bed over there in the corner."

Nothing loth, the baby girl cuddled down on the bed; the others climbed into their places, and tired with their play the whole four were presently sleeping soundly.

The nap was followed by the promised bath, that by their supper, and directly upon leaving the table they were sent to bed.

They were taken to Sunday-school the next morning, then brought back to the house and ordered to stay within doors until the return of Mr. and Mrs. Coote

from church, the latter remarking that she had no intention of being bothered with other people's children, and directing Ethel to teach some Bible texts to the younger ones and commit to memory several verses herself, all to be recited to Mr. Coote in the afternoon.

Ethel felt dismayed, for it would be a new thing for Harry and especially so for baby Nan, of whom nothing in the form of lessons had ever yet been required.

"I'll try, ma'am," she said, "but please don't be hard with them if they can't say a verse perfectly, for they've never had to learn lessons before, except to say their A B Cs."

"High time for them to begin then," was the curt rejoinder. "Now mind what I say and do exactly as you're told, or you'll wish you had when Mr. Coote gets hold of you." With that she walked away, Ethel looking after her with frightened eyes.

"O Blanche, whatever shall we do?" she exclaimed tearfully. "I'm afraid Nan can't learn a verse."

"Oh, yes, Ethel, she can; so don't you

cry," returned Blanche, putting her arms round Ethel's neck and giving her a kiss. "Don't you remember that little one that's just two words? 'Jesus wept.' Nan can learn that I'm sure; so can Harry."

"Course I can," said Harry, straightening himself proudly. "I'm not a baby, I know that verse now: 'Jesus wept.' But, say, why did He do that, Ethel? what was He so sorry about?"

"Because Lazarus, the man He loved, was dead and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were so full of grief. He loved them, too, and was sorry for them."

"Tell us the story 'bout it, Ethel," requested the little fellow.

Ethel complied, and then he and Nan repeated over and over the short verse, "Jesus wept."

"Now we must learn ours, Blanche," said Ethel.

"I've thought of one that mamma used to teach us," returned Blanche: "'I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.'"

"Yes, I remember that mamma taught us that, and that she said they were God's own words. Let's all love Him

and He will love us and care for us even if nobody in all this world does. I've thought of a verse too: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' Mamma said they were Jesus' own words and they meant that I might pray to Him, telling Him all my joys and all my troubles, and He would listen even more lovingly than she did when I told them to her, and would give me strength to bear them or help me out of them. Oh, I have often been so glad, since dear mamma and papa went away to heaven, so glad to know that; and I have told my troubles to Jesus and I'm sure He has heard me and helped me to bear them, and that He will help me, and everybody that tries it, to bear every trouble and trial He sends."

"But what for does He send troubles and trials?" asked Blanche. "I should think if He loves us so much He wouldn't let us have any at all."

"I remember I asked mamma that once," replied Ethel thoughtfully, "and she said it was to make us good and to keep us from loving this world too well;

just as she sometimes punished us to make us good, because to be good is the only way to be happy; and she taught me this verse, 'As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent.' Oh," added the little girl, with a burst of tears, "if we only had mamma now to help us to be good!"

"She and papa have gone to be with God, you know, Ethel, and don't you believe they ask Him to help us to be good?" asked Blanche, tears shining in her eyes also.

"Yes, yes, indeed!" returned Ethel, "and it makes me so glad to think of that."

"O Ethel, you have to say more than one verse, haven't you?" asked Blanche.

"Oh, yes, so I have. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,' is another one that mamma taught me. I'll say it. Such a sweet verse, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," returned Blanche.

"Saved from what, Ethel?" asked Harry. "I don't want to live here with these horrid folks. I wish He'd saved us from that."

"But it would be a great deal worse to live in that dreadful place where the devil and his angels are," said Ethel with grave earnestness; "and that's what mamma said Jesus would save us from; that and the love of sin. Oh, now I remember some verses she taught me about heaven: 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.' Oh, just think, children! never a headache, or backache, or heart-ache, or hurt feelings, or any sort of pain or ache, but always to feel bright and happy and well. And that's where papa and mamma are—well and glad all the time."

'O Ethel, how delightful!" exclaimed Blanche. "And then oughtn't we to be glad for them?"

"Yes, indeed! though we can't help being sorry for ourselves and each other, because we must do without them till we get there too."

Jane, the servant girl, opened the door and looked in at that moment. "Come,

you young uns, and eat your dinners," she said. "You's to eat fust this time 'fore de folks gits home from church."

The children obeyed right willingly, but were disappointed to find only the usual plain fare.

"I 'spected a nice dinner to-day," grumbled Harry; "chicken or birds, and mashed potatoes and cranberries and good pie and cake."

"O Harry, dear, hush, hush!" Ethel said warningly, but half under her breath. "I'm afraid you'll get beaten or starved if—if they should find out that you talked so."

"Oh, it's too hard!" sighed Blanche. "I didn't want to stay with that hateful, cross old Aunt Sarah though."

"I didn't either," said Harry. "But 'most everybody's bad to us since papa and mamma went away."

Here Jane, who had gone back to her kitchen, poked in her head at the communicating door. "You'd better stop talkin' and get you dinners eat up 'fore the folks gits home from chu'ch; 'cause ef ye don't maybe you'll have to stop hungry."

The thought of that alarming possibility at once silenced every complaint, and hardly another word was spoken till their appetites were fully satisfied. A hasty washing of hands and faces followed and was scarcely over when the Cootes returned, and the little folks were summoned to the study and required to recite their verses of Scripture to the frowning, loud-voiced, impatient dominie, while the dinner for him and his wife was being set upon the table. It seemed a dreadful ordeal to the trembling little ones, and a great relief when it was over and they were ordered up to their own room for the remainder of the day.

CHAPTER IX.

Considering her extreme youthfulness, it was a hard and toilsome life that had now begun for Ethel. Day and night she had charge of her little brother and sisters; she must wash and dress them—or teach them to do those things for themselves, and see in every way to their comfort and amusement; also teach Nannette and Harry their little lessons. Besides she must learn her own, keep their room in order, and spend an hour or two every day in the use of her needle, under the instruction of Mrs. Coote, who was very strict and exacting, though she occasionally bestowed a few words of warm praise when she considered it to have been well earned.

On such occasions Ethel's cheek would flush and her eyes brighten as she listened, a feeling akin to love for the usually cold-mannered woman tugging at her heart strings; but ere she could summon up

courage for the expression of her pleasure and budding affection, the cold, distant manner had returned, and chilled and disappointed she could say no more than, "Yes, ma'am; thank you for praising my work. I mean to try always to do it as well as ever I can."

Meantime the intimacy between the Eldons and little Mary Keith grew and increased. From the first they seemed to take great pleasure in each other's society, and would play together in unbroken harmony by the hour; generally in Mr. Keith's grounds as Mrs. Coote was entirely willing to have them there, Mary's mother and grandmother no less so; and when Ethel's tasks were finished she was allowed to join the others. Her gentle, quiet, ladylike manner made her a great favorite with the ladies and she was sometimes allowed to do her stint of needlework there, sitting quietly with them while the younger children romped and played about the garden or on the porches.

There were some pictures on the wall of the pretty sitting room where the ladies spent most of their time, one of which particularly attracted Ethel's attention;

it was a woodland scene—a little valley, a small creek with a dam, running through it, near by a horse tethered to a sapling, and at a little distance, partly hidden by a thicket, a noble looking man in Continental uniform, on his knees in prayer.

"Mrs. Weston, who is that gentleman praying there in the woods?" Ethel at length ventured to ask.

"That is a picture of our Washington at Valley Forge," answered the lady, bestowing a look of loving admiration upon the kneeling figure.

"Washington?" repeated Ethel enquiringly. "I think I never heard of him before. He was a good man, I suppose?"

"Yes, my dear, and a great one also. I think there was never a better or greater mere man. He is called the father of his country because, with the help of God, he did more to gain her liberties than any other man."

"Oh, if it isn't too much trouble, will you please tell me about him and what he did?" Ethel asked eagerly, adding, "I'm only a little girl, you know, ma'am, and haven't lived in America very long; so I don't know much about its history."

The lady smiled, and softly stroking the child's hair, "Do you call yourself English, my dear?" she asked in a pleasant tone.

"No–o, ma'am," returned Ethel doubtfully; "papa was English but — but mamma, you know, was born on this side of the ocean, so I suppose I'm only half English, and Cousin George told me I'd have to be an American now, as I've come to live in this country."

"And you don't object?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; America seems a very good country and my cousins are all Americans, because they were born here."

"Yes; the generality of us Americans think these United States, taken all together, make the best land the sun shines on, as it certainly is the freest."

"Are all the people in it good, ma'am?" queried Ethel innocently.

"No, my dear, I am sorry to have to acknowledge that that is far from being the case. True very many of the wicked ones—burglars, murderers, and the like—are of foreign birth or parentage, but some are natives and the children of natives. But I must answer your ques-

tion about Washington. He was the great-grandson of a gentleman named John Washington, who came over from England and settled in Virginia, which was then an English colony, as were the other twelve States. There were thirteen in all of those that formed the Union in the beginning. Do you know anything about how the colonies were settled in the first place?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, then, I must tell you that one of these days. But now you want to know about the picture. What you see there occurred during the first war with England, the war which set us free and made the colonies States. This country was then far smaller and poorer than it is now; for we have now many large and flourishing States; more than three times as many as there were then."

"Yes, ma'am; Cousin George told me I ought to be glad to be an American, because this was the very best and freest country in the world."

Mrs. Weston gave the little girl a pleased smile. "I entirely agree with Cousin George," she said, "and ever since

I can remember have been glad and thankful that God gave me my birth in this dear, Christian land, many of whose people came here when it was but a desolate wilderness, in order that they might be free to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

"But I must tell you about the picture. Washington was the commander-in-chief of our armies during the war of the Revolution, which ended in making us free States.

"That war began in the year 1775; the Declaration of Independence was made in the summer of 1776; but it took years of fighting to induce the King of England and his Cabinet to acknowledge that we were actually a free and independent people, no longer subject to their oppressive acts; a long and terrible struggle was necessary to bring that about.

"By the fall of 1777 a good many battles had been fought; one of them—the battle of Saratoga—won a great victory for the Americans; but things had not gone so well for us farther south. Washington had suffered defeat at the battle of the Brandywine and in consequence the

British had got possession of Philadelphia. Our troops must if possible be kept together through the cold winter, and that in some place from which the British could be watched and prevented from getting away to any great distance, to do mischief to the people of the land.

"There was no town that would answer the purpose, and the place that suited best was Valley Forge on the Schuylkill River, twenty-one miles above Philadelphia. It was a little valley lying between two ridges or hills and covered by a thick forest. The poor soldiers had no tents and were in sore need of clothes, also of blankets and shoes. They—even the officers—were astonished when Washington ordered the trees cut down and log huts built of them. But they spent their Christmas holidays at the work and were much surprised and delighted at their success, when they found that they had changed the forest into cabins thatched with boughs, in the order of a regular encampment.

"But oh, what suffering they still had to undergo for lack of food and clothing! Many were almost, some entirely, naked.

"For more than two years the war had been going on and for four months they had been fighting the enemies of their country, marching and counter-marching day and night in order to baffle the designs of the foe against their dear native land; and they had come to this spot with naked, bleeding feet and destitute of supplies of every kind.

"It was a dreadful winter for that poor army. Washington did all he could, but it was out of his power to relieve anything like all the suffering; and Congress was strangely apathetic, and slow to do what it might have done to give relief.

"Because of their sad neglect the condition of the poor, patient soldiers grew worse and worse so that men died for want of straw or other bedding to raise them at night from the damp, cold earth; and sometimes they had no fuel to make fires, for want of shoes and stockings to enable them to go through the snow and cut it in the woods near at hand; often they had no meat, sometimes no bread, and there was danger that they would perish with famine or have to disperse in search of food."

"And why didn't they?" asked Ethel. "I should think anything would be better than staying there freezing and starving to death."

"Because they loved their country and her liberties better than they loved themselves," replied Mrs. Weston. "They were fighting for her, for their own homes, wives, and children, yet, as I have said, Congress was most shamefully neglecting them, while most of the people in the vicinity of their camp were Tories—that is in favor of the British, unwilling to do anything for the cause of freedom, and ready to help the foes of their country, for which these poor, starving, bleeding, freezing men were willing to lay down their lives.

"But Washington was their friend, doing all in his power for them, showing a fatherly concern and fellow-feeling for all their troubles and privations, exerting himself in every way to help and encourage them, and urging Congress to come to their relief.

"Washington was a Christian man; so he carried the troubles and distresses of his poor soldiers, and the woes of his

bleeding country to God, who is the hearer and answerer of prayer. Probably the woods were a more private place than any other to which he had access at that time; and I presume he never knew that any earthly creature had ever seen him at his devotions."

"Who was it that saw him, Mrs Weston?" asked Ethel.

"The man at whose house he was lodged: Mr. Isaac Potts. He owned the dam, and one day was strolling toward it, along the bank of the creek, when he heard a solemn voice, and walking quietly in the direction of the sound, he saw Washington's horse tied to a sapling and near by, in a thicket, the dear man himself on his knees in prayer, with the tears coursing down his cheeks."

"Did Washington see him — Mr. Potts?" asked Ethel, gazing with eager interest into the lady's face.

"No; doubtless his eyes were closed, and Mr. Potts, feeling that he was on holy ground, stole quietly away, back to his own house, with eyes full of tears. His wife noticed them as he entered and asked what was the matter. Then he told her

what he had just seen, adding, 'If there is anyone on this earth whom the Lord will listen to, it is George Washington; and I feel a presentiment that under such a commander there can be no doubt of our eventually establishing our independence, and that God in his providence has willed it so.'"

"And that's what the picture is about?" Ethel said musingly, gazing upon it with redoubled interest. "I'm glad the Americans had such a good man for their general, and that God helped them to get free."

"Yes, as one of our poets has said:

"Oh, who shall know the might
Of the words he utter'd there?
The fate of nations there was turned
By the fervor of his prayer.

"But wouldst thou know his name
Who wandered there alone?
Go, read enroll'd in Heaven's archives,
The prayer of Washington."

"Ah, I like those verses," Ethel said, her eyes shining. Then turning them again upon the picture, "He was praying for his poor soldiers then, wasn't he? I think you said so."

"No doubt; I know his heart bled for them in their sore extremities, for they were sore indeed. I have read that one day a foreign officer was walking with Washington among the huts where his soldiers were quartered, when they heard voices coming from between the logs of which they were built; "No pay, no provisions, no rum!" and one poor fellow whom they saw going from one hut to another, was naked except that he had a dirty blanket wrapped about him. Then that officer despaired of ever seeing the Americans gain their freedom."

"They did though, and I'm ever so glad of it!" Ethel said with satisfaction. "But—but you said they wanted rum. Were they drunkards, Mrs. Weston?"

"In those days, my dear, almost everybody took a little and did not think it wrong," replied the lady, adding, "though now we think it is."

"I hope God heard Washington's prayer and soon made that bad Congress take better care of the poor soldiers who were fighting for them," Ethel said enquiringly, still gazing earnestly at the picture.

"I am sorry to have to say that it was some time before Congress did much for their relief," returned Mrs. Weston. "Indeed two winters later they—the poor soldiers—were in much the same condition at Morristown, where they were encamped at that time, having only beds of straw on the ground and but a single blanket to each man; while still their clothing was very poor and some had no shoes.

"It was a very severe winter, the snow early in January being from four to six feet deep and so obstructing the roads that they could not travel back and forth to get provisions, and in consequence were often for days at a time without bread, then again as long without meat; and the cold and hunger made the poor fellows so weak that they were hardly fit for fighting or for building their huts."

"Oh, the poor, poor things!" exclaimed Ethel, tears starting to her eyes. "Did they ever try to run away or to steal something from the farmers to eat, when they were so dreadfully hungry?"

"Yes, they sometimes did steal sheep, hogs, and poultry; but since they were

starving and their just wages kept back from them, one can hardly feel like blaming them very severely for taking a little food from those whom they were defending.

"There was only one decided mutiny; that was on the 1st of January, 1781, by about two thousand men of the Pennsylvania troops, stationed at Morristown and under the command of General Wayne.

"They had made their preparations secretly, appointing a sergeant major their commander, calling him major-general. At a preconcerted signal all, excepting a part of three regiments, paraded under arms without officers, marched to the magazines and supplied themselves with ammunition and provisions; then they seized six fieldpieces and took horses from General Wayne's stables to draw them."

"And nobody tried to stop them?" exclaimed Ethel enquiringly.

"Yes; hearing what was going on their officers tried to do so, calling on the men who did not join in the revolt to help. But the mutineers fired, killing a captain and wounding several others;

then they ordered the men who had not revolted to come over to their side, threatening that if they did not they would kill them with their bayonets; and they went over. Then General Wayne tried his influence with the men, who all loved him, using both persuasion and threats to bring them back to their duty. But they refused to listen even to him, and when he cocked his pistol at them they pointed their bayonets at his breast, saying, 'We respect and love you; you have often led us into the field of battle, but we are no longer under your command; we warn you to be on your guard, for if you fire your pistol or attempt to force us to obey your commands we will instantly put you to death.'

"Wayne then tried to persuade them, speaking to them of their love for their country. They answered by reminding him how shamefully Congress was treating them. He spoke of the pleasure and encouragement their conduct would give to the enemy. In reply to that they called his attention to their tattered garments and how thin they themselves were from starvation; they told him they dearly

loved the cause of freedom and wanted to fight its battles, if only Congress would see to it that their sore need was relieved."

"I don't think that was asking too much, do you, Mrs. Weston?" asked Ethel.

"No, not at all."

"And did General Wayne give them what they asked and had a right to ask?"

"He could not do that, but he supplied them with provisions and then marched them to Princeton, where he heard their demands and referred them to the civil authority of Pennsylvania.

"In the mean time the British general, Sir Henry Clinton, heard the story of the revolt, and not understanding the spirit and motives of the troops, sent a British sergeant and a New Jersey Tory named Ogden, with a written offer to them that if they would lay down their arms and march to New York they should receive in hard cash the money owed them by the American Congress, be well clothed, and have free pardon for having fought against the King of England; and not be required to fight on his side and against their

country, unless they chose to do so of their own accord."

Ethel looked intensely interested. "And did they do it?" she asked half breathlessly.

"No, indeed," replied Mrs. Weston; "they were not fighting for money, but for liberty, their homes, their wives and little ones; but the money Congress owed them, the food and clothes, were necessary even to keep them alive, so that they felt justified in using their weapons in redressing their grievances while still looking with horror upon the armed oppressors of their country, and feeling that they would rather die than prove traitors to her. 'See, comrades,' one of them said to the others, 'he takes us for traitors. Let us show him that America can furnish but one Arnold, and that America has no truer friends than ourselves.'

"The others approved his sentiments. They immediately seized Clinton's spies and papers and took them to General Wayne, stipulating that the men should not be executed till their own affairs with Congress were settled, and that if their

complaints were not attended to the prisoners should be delivered up to them again when they demanded them."

"Did Congress do what they asked of them?" inquired Ethel.

"Yes; then the spies were executed, and the reward which it appears had been offered for their apprehension, would have been given to the men who had seized them, but the brave, patriotic fellows refused to accept it, poor as they were, saying that necessity had forced them to demand justice from Congress, but they wanted no reward for doing their duty to their bleeding country."

"I like them for that!" exclaimed Ethel, "and I don't think they were at all to blame for making that Congress pay them what they had earned by working and fighting so long and so hard."

"No, nor do I," returned Mrs. Weston, "and I am proud to own them as my countrymen."

"It is a very interesting story; thank you for telling it to me, Mrs. Weston," said Ethel. "I'd like to know more about that good General Washington and that war. All the English people didn't

want the Americans abused so, did they?"

"Oh, no, my dear! Some of them tried hard to have their wrongs redressed. Some day I will tell you more about it, but now I hear Mrs. Coote calling you."

CHAPTER X.

ETHEL had been greatly interested in Mrs. Weston's story of Washington and the Revolution. She was eager to hear more, and found both ladies of the Keith family kindly ready to gratify her whenever she was allowed to carry her needlework over there instead of doing it in the room in the parsonage appropriated to the use of herself, brother, and sisters. She was given very little time for recreation, so could not read much for herself on that or any other subject; perceiving which, Mrs. Weston often read to her, pausing now and then to explain anything the little girl did not seem to entirely comprehend, so helping the child to a great deal of information which at that time she could have gained in no other way.

Ethel was very grateful; and, loving, generous little soul that she was, wanted others to share her pleasure; so repeated

to Harry and the little sisters all she thought they could understand of what she had learned from the ladies. Also, supposing that Mrs. Coote was well read on the subject, she ventured to ask some questions of her.

"I know nothing about those old times in this country, and what's more, I don't want to know; so let me hear no more about it," was the ungracious rejoinder, and Ethel dared not venture another word.

"You're no American," Mrs. Coote went on presently, "so why should you care about those old stories?"

"I—I believe I'm half American," Ethel returned hesitatingly. "I was born in Jamaica and so was my dear mamma."

"Eh! I didn't know that before. But Jamaica is only a tolerably large island, and though it's on this side the ocean it belongs to England. And your father was born in old England, wasn't he?"

"Yes: and I like England, but Cousin George says as we've come to America to live for the rest of our lives, we're Americans now."

"Humph! So as you behave well I for one don't care whether you are Americans or English," returned Mrs. Coote; and there the conversation dropped.

Whenever the weather was at all suitable the three younger children were sent out of doors to play, Ethel joining them when her task was done, and usually they were all invited into Mrs. Keith's yard or house.

But stormy days had to be spent shut up in their own small room, and poor little Ethel was almost at her wit's end to keep Harry and Nannette from making such a disturbance as would bring reproof and sometimes sore punishment upon them.

They had little or no love for Mrs. Coote, who never lavished any demonstrations of affection upon them, and from her husband they shrank as from a dangerous foe. Fortunately they rarely saw him except when summoned to a recitation of the verses of Scripture which they were compelled to learn for the express purpose of enabling him to show off to chance visitors as one who was successfully training up in the way they should

go the young orphans committed to his fatherly care.

As their Uncle Albert had promised, they were remembered at Christmas time by the relatives in Philadelphia, a box being sent direct to Ethel, in Mr. Coote's care. Fortunately it reached the house one day in his absence, and Mrs. Coote put it privately away, never breathing a word to him of its arrival.

On Christmas morning, soon after breakfast, she opened it herself in presence of the children, first telling them whence it had come and cautioning them to be perfectly quiet, or they might lose some of the contents.

There were fruits, cakes, candies, and toys; all in such plentiful supply that the children were almost wild with delight.

All four urged Mrs. Coote to share with them. She looked pleased that they should wish it, accepted a very little, then saying, "If you like you can, after a bit, carry some over to your friends at Mr. Keith's; and, Ethel, to-morrow you may write a little letter of thanks to your uncles and the rest in Philadelphia, and

I will mail it for you," she left them to the enjoyment of their gifts.

If anything could have added to their felicity it was the note from Mrs. Keith, presently brought in by her servant girl, inviting all four to take their Christmas dinner with little Mary, and to come as early as possible with Mrs. Coote's consent.

"Oh, Mrs. Coote, can't we go this minute?" asked Blanche and Harry in a breath, while Nannette piped, "Me wants to go, dus now; dis minute," and Ethel's soft brown eyes made the same request.

"Yes, yes; I'll be only too glad to be rid of your noise and chatter for the rest of the day," was the rather ungracious reply. "But you've all got to be dressed in your best first," she added, going to the closet and taking down the dresses the little girls were wont to call their "Sunday frocks," in which she presently proceeded to array them.

That did not take long, and they were soon at the door of Mr. Keith's hospitable dwelling, exchanging a merry Christmas with the ladies and little Mary,

displaying the toys sent by their relatives in Philadelphia, and offering a share of their sweets from the same source.

Then they were led into the parlor where was a beautiful Christmas tree loaded with ornaments and gifts.

"Oh," cried Ethel, tears starting to her eyes as she spoke, "how it reminds me of Christmas times when our dear papa and mamma were with us!"

"Yes, I remember the one we had last Christmas," said Blanche; "and I think this one is just as pretty as it was."

"So do I," said Harry. "Oh, thank you, ma'am!" as Mrs. Keith took down a bag of marbles and another of candy and handed them to him.

"And this is for dear little Nannette," she said, disengaging a doll from the tree and putting it into the hands of the baby girl, who received it in almost speechless delight.

There was another almost exactly like it for her own little Mary, a larger one for Blanche, a neat housewife and pretty book for Ethel, and a bag of candies for each of the five; for little Mary had

waited for hers until the coming of her guests.

What a happy day it was to the children! The grown people seemed to lay themselves out for their enjoyment; games and stories filled most of the time not taken up with the partaking of the grand Christmas dinner of turkey and all the usual accompaniments for the first course—plum pudding, ice-cream, fruits, and cake for the dessert.

The Eldons were sent for by Mrs. Coote at their usual early bedtime, and obeyed the summons without a murmur.

"Dear Mrs. Keith, you and Mrs. Weston are so good and kind to us; we've had such a pleasant time," Ethel said as she bade good-night.

"You are very welcome, dear child," was the kindly response, "and I hope you and my little Mary will have many a pleasant time together while you are living so near us."

"Thank you, ma'am; I hope so, too," returned Ethel gratefully, then hurried away with her little brother and sisters.

Mrs. Coote met them at the parsonage door. "Go right up to your room and

to bed everyone of you," she said, and they silently obeyed.

"Strange that their uncles didn't send some Christmas remembrance to the children," remarked Mr. Coote to his wife as they sat together at the tea table.

"Possibly they may have thought they had enough to do in providing for their own, and that you and I might find some little thing for those you promised to treat as if they were your own," she rejoined in a slightly sarcastic tone.

"Humph! we're not in circumstances to do much for our own if we had 'em," he sniffed angrily; "so I don't consider myself pledged to do anything of the kind."

"And the children didn't expect it, I'm sure; nobody would ever mistake you for a Santa Claus," she returned with a not particularly pleasant langh.

He colored and flashed an angry look at her, but let the remark pass in silence. Neither then nor afterward did his wife let him know of the Christmas box sent to the children. She had given them only a part of the sweets that day, but

they received the rest in small instalments till all were gone.

So long as the weather was pleasant a part of nearly every day was spent at the house of their kind neighbors, but when it stormed their only refuge for the greater part of the time was the small room appropriated to them over the kitchen in their temporary home. It was hard for all, but especially for Harry and Nannette, to be so constantly confined to such close quarters, and Ethel could not always keep them quiet; they sometimes played noisily, at others fretted and cried aloud because they were so tired of staying in that little room where there was so small space for running and romping.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Coote would tolerate such noise, and again and again the hearts of Ethel and Blanche were made to ache by the sore punishment meted out to the little brother and sister. And sometimes they themselves were in disgrace and severely dealt with for failures in their tasks, or anger or too much sympathy shown the other two when they were punished.

These were great trials, as also was the reciting of their Bible verses to Mr. Coote, and being made to repeat them before company. They were warned not to tell any tales to the neighbors, and threatened with dire consequences if they disobeyed. So most of their troubles were kept to themselves.

Ethel looked and longed for the promised visit from her uncle Albert, but he did not come; he seemed to have forgotten his promise. Then after a while Mr. Coote took to reading to the children letters which he said came from their uncles, reproving and threatening them with punishment for rebellious conduct toward those who now had them in charge, and bidding them be very obedient and submissive.

Those letters were deliberate forgeries, but the innocent little ones never dreamed of such deceit and wickedness on the part of the man who professed to be so good, and poor Ethel was well nigh heartbroken that her uncles should think so ill of her and her dear little brother and sisters, and write so cruelly to them.

She tried very hard to be good and

industrious at her tasks, wanting the time to come as soon as possible when she would be able to support herself, Blanche, Harry, and Nannette.

Thinking of that she put forth every effort to learn the various kinds of needlework Mrs. Coote undertook to teach her, with the assurance that if she became expert in them all she could some day earn money in that way.

At times the child's heart beat high with hope that when she was grown up she would be able to make with her own earnings a little home for herself, brother, and sisters. Remembering the unkind treatment they had often received at the hands of the aunts and cousins in Philadelphia she was not at all sure that they would be much better off could they return there—and if they could go back how hard it would be to bid farewell to the kind friends next door—but what could be more delightful than to get away from these stern guardians often so unkind and unjust. And then, when she was old enough to know how to set about it, perhaps she could find her maternal grandparents, and they would give a

good home to their daughter's orphan children.

Their uncle Albert did at length make them a hasty visit, but Mr. Coote took good care that they should not be left for a moment alone with him. Also he treated them with the greatest and most effusive kindness in their uncle's presence, so that Mr. Eldon left them there feeling assured that they had a very happy home.

Thus two years rolled slowly away to Ethel and Blanche, Harry and Nannette, bringing little change except that they all grew older and taller ; wiser too in some respects and more than ever fondly attached to each other, and the next-door neighbors who treated them so kindly.

CHAPTER XI.

At length a change came suddenly to the little orphans. One unfortunate day Mr. Coote was in an unusually bad humor, and under a very slight provocation from Harry, who was more inclined for play than study, the weather being warm and fields and garden seeming far more inviting than books, he flew at the child in a rage and gave him a most unmerciful beating; making it all the more severe because the little fellow screamed so loudly that more than one neighbor came running to enquire what was wrong with the child, supposing some dreadful accident had befallen him, and Ethel, Blanche, and Nannette, lingering in the hall without, wept and sobbed as if their hearts would break.

"Stop beating that little fellow! stop this instant, you inhuman wretch, or I'll go for a policeman and have you arrested for cruelty to children," exclaimed a very decent looking woman, the wife of the

grocer at the next corner, rushing up to the window of the room where the beating was going on.

"You mind your own business," retorted Coote, letting go the child and pushing him angrily away from him. "He's had no more than he deserves; no, nor half so much, the idle, good-for-nothing little rascal."

"I only wish I had the strength to give you your deserts," returned the woman in indignant tones. "I wouldn't hesitate for a minute, and you'd find yourself good for nothing but bed for at least a week. The idea of such a wretch as you calling himself a Christian! You're worse than a heathen; and I declare I will have you arrested if you dare to strike that child again."

Coote tossed his whip into a corner and glared at the woman, while poor little Harry slunk away out the room, moving as if he had scarcely strength to walk.

His sisters instantly gathered about him, crying bitterly. Ethel caught him in her arms and held him close, sobbing out her grief and pity.

"O Harry, Harry, dear little brother, I am so, so, *so* sorry for you!"

"I, too," sobbed Blanche. "Oh, I wish our uncles would take us away and put us with somebody that would be kind and good to us."

"So do I," chimed in Nannette, tears rolling down her cheeks. "Oh, I wish we could live with Mrs. Keith and little Mary; if only they wanted more children over there."

"Oh, hush, hush, Nan," said Ethel warningly; for Mrs. Coote was coming toward them, having just seen the last of the enquiring neighbors out of the gate, dismissing them with a promise that she would see to the welfare of the children and not permit them to be abused.

"You needn't be afraid," she said to Ethel. "I've no intention of adding to Harry's punishment, for I think he has already had quite enough. I will help him upstairs, and the rest of you had best come along."

Taking the child's hand she led him a little way, but finding he was hardly able to stand or move, she lifted him in her arms and carried him up the stairs to the

children's room, the others following. Laying him on his bed she went from the room, to return almost immediately with a basin of warm water and some soothing ointment, with which she proceeded to make the poor little fellow as comfortable as possible, undressing him and laying him in his little bed again, handling him almost as tenderly as though he had been her own, though she said very little, leaving the children in some doubt whether she did or did not approve of her husband's barbarous treatment.

"I'm going down now," she said when she had finished. "You needn't have any more lessons to-day, any of you. I think it would be as well for you girls to stay here with Harry. You may play, sleep, or do whatever you please so that you don't get into mischief or make a racket that can be heard down in the study."

"Yes, ma'am, thank you," returned Ethel, "we'll be quiet as mice and as good as we know how."

Mrs. Coote had hardly gone when the little boy raised himself in the bed and

looking with tearful eyes at his sisters grouped together beside him:

"I'll be a man some o' these days," he sobbed, "and then if I don't take that old rascal down and beat him harder'n he beat me to-day—it—it'll be queer. Yes, I'll just thrash him till he can't move, so I will."

"I couldn't feel sorry for him, I couldn't," sobbed Ethel, "but, O Harry, dear, we must try to forgive him; because the Bible says, 'Forgive your enemies. Forgive and ye shall be forgiven.' And we all need to have forgiveness from God. So we will ask our Heavenly Father to help us to forgive this cruel, cruel man, and to help us to get away from him so that he can't ever hurt us any more."

"Yes," said Harry, "after he's had one good, sound thrashing from me. I just ache to give it to him, and I will, just as soon as I'm big enough."

"Maybe God will punish him before that," sobbed Blanche. "I'm sure I hope so."

"Me too," said Nannette, wiping her tearful eyes. "I'll ask God to punish

the naughty man every time I say my prayers."

"Oh, no," said Ethel persuasively; "instead of that let's all ask Him to take us away from here and put us in a good home where we'll never see these cruel people any more."

While this talk was going on among the children Mrs. Coote had gone down to the study, where she found her husband striding angrily to and fro. He glanced at his wife as she came in and read scorn and contempt in the look she gave him.

"So you, I see, are ready to uphold that young rascal in his wrongdoing; and the meddlesome neighbors who come interfering here, as well," he said wrathfully.

"The neighbors were perfectly right," she answered in an icy tone, "and I'm not at all sure they haven't saved you from murder and the hangman's rope That's what your awful temper will bring you to some of these days, if you don't learn to exercise some self-control."

She paused for an instant, then went on in a tone of stern determination: "And I

warn you to beware how you lay a hand on one of those orphan children again; for as sure as you do I'll let the uncles know all about this thing, and they'll be promptly taken away out of your reach, inhuman brute that you are."

"Take care how you talk, woman," he said menacingly, though his cheek paled at her threat. "I'm the stronger of the two, and you may live to regret it."

"The stronger, but by far the more cowardly," she returned with a disagreeable laugh. "I'm not afraid o' you, Patrick Coote; you're too well aware of my worth to you to try doing me any deadly harm."

"Deadly harm?" he repeated, "who talks of deadly harm? 'Twas you that said it, not I. But I'll have you, as well as those unruly youngsters, to know who's master in this house."

So saying he took up his hat and walked out through the front yard and down the street, Mrs. Coote standing at the window and sending after him a glance of mingled contempt and disdain.

"I haven't wasted any fondling on those children," she said to herself, "but

I'd sooner take a beating myself than give that bit of a boy such a thrashing for next to nothing, and I'll see that it isn't done again."

Mr. Coote stalked on down the street in by no means a happy frame of mind, everybody he met seeming to him to regard him with contempt and aversion; for the whole neighborhood was roused by the story of his abuse of the little orphan boy unfortunately committed to his care—a story quickly circulated by those who had heard Harry's screams and rushed to the house to discover the cause and aid the sufferer.

One of his own parishioners, meeting, accosted him:

"See here, sir, you'd best be careful how you abuse those little orphans in your care, for we Americans don't approve of any such doings and you'll get yourself into trouble, you may depend on it."

With a muttered, "You will please attend to your own affairs and leave me to attend to mine," Coote pushed past the speaker and stalked on his way.

Harry's screams had been heard at Mr

Keith's, and the grocer's wife had stopped at their gate on her way home to tell the story of the brutal treatment the poor child had received. The two ladies shed tears over it and longed to go to the rescue of the poor little ones, yet refrained for the present, and took time to consider what would be the best plan to adopt for their relief. They talked the matter over together, and finally decided that the uncles must be informed of the true state of affairs, when doubtless they would take steps to secure the children from a repetition of such cruel treatment.

"Ethel writes a very neat hand," remarked Mrs. Keith. "I wonder she has not complained to them long before this."

"Doubtless her letters, if she has written any, have all passed through the hands of Mr. or Mrs. Coote and been suppressed if she ventured any complaint of their treatment," returned Mrs. Weston.

"Yes, I dare say that is so," said Mrs. Keith. "Well, the very next time Ethel comes over here I shall ask her if she would like to write to any of her relatives and knows their address, offering her

writing materials and postage stamp and promising to mail the letter for her."

"A very good plan if she knows the address, which I doubt," returned Mrs. Weston.

They did not know it, but Ethel in her room watching beside Harry, who had sobbed himself to sleep, was considering the same question, namely, how she could let her uncles know how badly she and her little brother and sisters were being treated. She had been ignorant of the address until the day before, when Mrs. Coote had bidden her carry out the scrap-basket from the study and empty it into the coal scuttle in the kitchen, and in doing so she had seen and secured an envelope bearing the address of the firm of Eldon Brothers. It could do no harm to take it, she thought, as otherwise it would only be burned up; and having an ill-defined feeling that some day it might prove of service to her, she had hastily put it in her pocket. It was there still, and now taking it out she gazed at it with her tear-dimmed eyes, trying to think how she could get writing materials and postage stamp, make use of them, and post

her letter, when written, without the knowledge of Mr. or Mrs. Coote, who, if they knew, would be sure to prevent her from sending it.

"I will ask God to help me," she said to herself, and at once dropping on her knees sent up a silent but most fervid prayer that a way might be opened for the accomplishment of her wish.

CHAPTER XII.

It was some days before Ethel's prayers seemed to be answered or the kind plans of Mrs. Keith and her mother could be carried out, for the children were forbidden to go over there. They were permitted to be out for only a short time each day for exercise, and were under strict orders to keep to the side of the parsonage grounds farthest from Mr. Keith's, though no reason was assigned.

But at last, it having occurred to Mrs. Coote that the very fact of the children being so suddenly and entirely deprived of the privilege of paying frequent visits to the home of little Mary—their favorite resort—would tend to confirm any evil report that might have reached the Keiths, she gave them leave, one afternoon, to go over there for an hour or two; a permission of which they promptly availed themselves.

They received a hearty welcome from

both the ladies and little Mary, accompanied with kind enquiries in regard to their health and why they had stayed away so long.

"We weren't allowed to come," replied Harry; "they ordered us to stay over there in their yard ever since that horrid man gave me such an awful beating for just nothing at all 'cept that I couldn't study; 'twas so hot, you know, and I wanted to be out-doors under the trees."

"Ah, you were lazy, were you, Harry?" said Mrs. Weston, with difficulty repressing an inclination to smile.

"Yes, ma'am, I s'pose so," returned the little lad, "but boys can't help that sometimes when it's warm and they're tired of lessons and the birds are singing and the bees humming and all the little creatures out-doors having such a good time."

"Ah, but the bees are gathering honey and the birds building their nests, hatching their eggs, or rearing their young; they catch worms and insects for them to eat, don't you know? I think all the creatures God has made have something to do."

"But they don't work all the time, do they?" he queried. "And oughtn't boys to have some time to play?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! some time—after the lessons have been learned and recited."

"Well, I believe I'll go and play now with the girls out there under the trees," he said, and ran out whistling and laughing.

But Ethel lingered behind. She had brought no work with her, but seemed inclined to stay with the ladies.

"Sit down in this low rocking-chair, dear, and tell us what you have been doing with yourself for the last week or two, that you have not been in to see us," said Mrs. Keith, in a kindly, caressing tone.

"Oh, thank you, ma'am, I have wanted to come over here so badly! But it is just as Harry said, we weren't permitted," said Ethel, taking the offered chair. "Mrs. Coote always ordered us to stay on the other side of the garden. She didn't say why, and we are never allowed to ask that question."

"And that has been ever since the day we heard such dreadful screams from

Harry and saw people running to the parsonage door and windows to find out what ailed him," said Mrs. Keith. "We were told that Mr. Coote was beating him, and it seems it was true?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Ethel, tears springing to her eyes. "Oh, I thought he was just killing him! and for next to nothing. He's such a little fellow, and wanted to play when he was told to study his lesson. It was hot and close in the house, you know, and looked so pleasant out of doors!"

"Yes. The little fellow ought to have attended better to his work, it is true, and taken his recreation when school hours were over," said Mrs. Keith, "but I cannot think he deserved treatment so severe as was given him, and if I were in your place, Ethel, I should write to my uncles and tell them all the facts. I think they would manage in some way to prevent a repetition of such severe punishment, especially for so slight an offence."

"Yes, ma'am, I have been wanting to write to my uncles and tell them everything about it, but I couldn't, because I have no pen, ink, or paper, no postage

stamp, no money to buy anything with, and even if I had I wouldn't be permitted to send a letter without Mr. or Mrs. Coote reading it first. And if they found I'd written all that to my uncles they'd whip me for doing it and tear my letter up instead of sending it, or maybe put it in the fire.

"Well, dear child, if you want to write such a letter, I will furnish you now with all the materials needed, and mail it for you when it is done; because your uncles ought to be informed of the cruel treatment received by their nephew and nieces." Mrs. Keith rose as she spoke, opened her writing desk, took from it pen, paper, and stamped envelope, and made Ethel seat herself at the table.

Ethel's eyes sparkled. She took from her pocket the envelope containing the address of the Eldon brothers, and was about to seat herself before the desk; but a sudden thought seemed to strike her.

"Oh, Mrs. Keith," she exclaimed, "I can't write fast, and I'm ever so afraid that Mrs. Coote will call us to come home before I could possibly get the letter done!"

"Well. then, suppose I write it at your dictation, and you sign it when finished," said the lady.

Ethel gave a joyful assent, dictated quite rapidly, telling of Harry's sore punishment for his slight fault, and the severity to which they were all subjected more or less, and begging that they might be taken from the care of those who treated them so ill; adding that she was almost sure Harry would be a good boy if he were with someone who would be kind and patient with him; but Mr. Coote was never that.

"There, I believe that is all I need to say, Mrs. Keith," concluded the little girl.

"Well, dear child," said Mrs. Keith, "suppose you sit down here and add in your own handwriting that this has been written at your dictation, and sign your name to it."

Ethel did so, Mrs. Keith directed an envelope, enclosed the letter in it, and sent it by a trusty messenger directly to the post-office.

"Oh," asked Ethel, "do you think, Mrs. Weston and Mrs. Keith, that my

uncles can be angry with me for doing this?"

"No, dear, I am very sure they would never be willing to have their brother's orphan children so ill treated," said Mrs. Weston, "and I think they will not let many days pass before they come to see about it."

Mrs. Keith expressed the same opinion and the little girl gave a sigh of relief; then her face clouded.

"But oh, I shall be so sorry to go away where I can never see you dear ladies!" she exclaimed, looking lovingly into their faces, while tears gathered in her eyes—"or little Mary again."

"Don't worry about that, dear child," said Mrs. Keith kindly; "we are not so very far from Philadelphia, and I think your uncles will let you come sometimes to see us."

That comforted Ethel and she grew quite cheerful.

The Eldon brothers entered their office together the next morning and as usual found a pile of letters, brought by the early mail, awaiting them.

"Ah, where does this come from, I

wonder!" remarked Mr. George, taking up one directed in a delicate female hand.

He broke the seal and glanced over the contents. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "a post-script signed by our little niece Ethel. The letter was written by her dictation, she says, because she cannot write very fast, and every word in it is true. Dear, dear, what a wretch is that Coote!" Then he read the missive aloud to his brother.

"The scoundrel! the unfeeling monster!" exclaimed Mr. Albert in hot indignation. "He shall not be allowed another opportunity to abuse those poor little ones. I'll go for them at once and have them safe in my own house before night. I shall take them out of his clutches without a moment's delay." He drew out his watch as he spoke, and glancing at it, "There is barely more than time for me to catch the first train," he said, "but I need no preparation."

"Except some money, I presume," said his brother, handing him a roll of bank-bills which he had just taken from the safe.

"Ah, yes! that is very essential!" he

returned, pocketing them and taking up his hat. "Good-by; you may look for my return this afternoon with the four children."

"Yes, I hope so," said his brother, "and in the meantime I shall do what I can to prepare our wives to receive the poor little things and give them a kind and cordial welcome."

Ethel and her little brother and sisters had just finished their dinner when the door bell rang and their Uncle Albert's voice was heard in the hall asking for them.

Ethel's heart beat fast with mingled hope and fear. Had he come in response to her letter? and if so was it in anger toward her oppressors? Her eyes turned enquiringly upon the face of Mrs. Coote, where she read both surprise and suppressed wrath.

"Is this some of your doing?" she muttered menacingly; but before the frightened child could reply the door opened and Mr. Coote put in his head, saying:

"Mr. Eldon is here, asking to see the children. Let them come right in. No

help for it, Sarah," he added in a lower tone and with a look of suppressed anger and apprehension. "I can't say yet whether it's any tale-telling that's brought him; but if that's the case somebody' ll have to suffer for it." And he too looked menacingly at poor trembling little Ethel.

"There then, go along all o'you," said Mrs. Coote, who had just finished wiping their hands and faces, "and mind what you say and do, or you may get yourselves into trouble."

Then Ethel spoke up bravely, "Don't be afraid, Nan," for the little one looked sadly frightened and ready to cry; "we needn't any of us be afraid of our own dear kind Uncle Albert," and with that they all hastened into his presence.

He received them most affectionately, hugging and kissing them in turn.

"I have come to take you home with me," he said, "and we will start just as soon as you and your luggage can be got ready. You may go and pack all your belongings, for you shall never spend another night in this house."

Then turning to Coote:

"And you, sir, may be thankful that

after your brutal treatment of my little nephew I allow you to escape with no greater punishment than the loss of the salary that is due you for the care —such care as it has been too! of these poor little helpless children—my deceased brother's orphans. My blood boils with indignation when I think of it, and I feel that it would be a satisfaction to thrash you within an inch of your life. But I have decided simply to take the children where it will be out of your power to torment and ill-use them as you have been doing, leaving your punishment to Him who has said: 'Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless children. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot and I will kill you with the sword.' I wonder you are not afraid of God's judgments lighting upon you, for in His Word He is called the deliverer of the fatherless, their judge, their helper, and their father. And you who profess to be His minister ought to be well acquainted with His Word."

"And you who are only a layman, should not dare to so accuse and abuse

me—one of the clergy!" exclaimed Coote wrathfully, yet paling visibly as he spoke. "Pray, sir, what proof can you bring of your insulting accusations? which I declare to be false, for I have—according to promise — treated these ill-behaved, rebellious children with all the lenity and fatherly kindness I should had they been my own offspring."

The children were still lingering in the room listening in round-eyed wonder to the strange and excited colloquy between the two men,

"Ethel, dear child," said her uncle turning to her, "do not fear to speak out and tell me in the presence of this man how he has beaten and abused you all, particularly your brother."

"You are going to take us away, uncle?" she asked, with a timid glance at the wrathful countenance of Coote.

"Yes, at once; so that he will never again have an opportunity to ill-use any one of you."

"He has been very cruel to us, uncle," Ethel said in reply; "to poor Harry most of all. I'm afraid he would have killed him that last time if the people hadn't

come to the doors and windows and made him stop. Poor Harry could hardly walk for days afterward," she added with a burst of sobs and tears.

"Yes, uncle, he 'most killed me, and I've got some of the marks on me yet," said Harry, pulling up his coat-sleeve and displaying some marks on his arm. Guess he would have killed me if folks hadn't come and stopped him. But I'm going to pay him back well when I'm a big man. I'll just thrash him till he can't stand."

"I think you'll forget about the smart and be willing to forgive him before that," returned Mr. Eldon with a half smile, drawing the little fellow to him and smoothing his hair caressingly.

Coote was striding angrily to and fro across the floor, clenching his fists, grinding his teeth, and scowling at the little group as though fairly aching to knock them all down.

Mrs. Coote was not there; she had lingered but a moment in the hall, then, having heard the announcement of Mr. Eldon that he had come to take the children away, had hastened to their room and set

to work with much energy and despatch to gather together and pack up all that belonged to them.

"There now, my dears, go and get ready for your journey," said Mr. Eldon, releasing Harry from his embrace and smiling kindly upon all four. "Gather up all your possessions—at least all that you care to keep. No doubt Mrs. Coote will help you with the work, and as soon as you are ready we will start for the station." Then noting the look of apprehension on each young face, he said: "Harry and Nannette may as well stay here with me; so many of you would only be in Mrs. Coote's way, and their hats and coats can be put on here."

"But they don't look so very well dressed, uncle," said Ethel hesitatingly; "and wouldn't you like them to have their best clothes on?"

"Ah, yes; that is well thought of," he replied. "Well, get them ready first and send them down here to me; then follow as soon as you and the trunk are ready."

At that all four hurried obediently from the parlor and up to the room in which most of their time had been passed

since their coming to the house. Mrs. Coote was there, down on her knees, packing their trunk with great expedition. She turned her head and looked grimly at them as they entered.

"Somebody's been telling tales, I reckon," she remarked gruffly. "Well, it'll rid me of a good deal of care and bother. I shall breathe freer when you're gone, for you've been no end of trouble."

"I'm sorry if we have, ma'am," said Ethel. "I've really tried to be good and helpful."

"Yes, you have, Ethel, and I've been fonder of you than I ever thought to be of any child," returned Mrs. Coote, her voice softening. "But I've got to give you up now, and there's no use fretting. There, children, I've laid out all your best clothes on the bed. Get into them as fast as you can while I finish packing your trunk."

They made haste to obey, Ethel and Blanche helping the younger two, and in a very short time they and their trunk were ready.

In the meanwhile Mr. Eldon had settled with Mr. Coote in full for all that was owing on the children's account; a

carriage was waiting at the gate, and the moment they appeared for their journey, he rose, told them to say good-by, then took his leave, leading Nannette, while the other three followed.

Mrs. Weston, Mrs. Keith, and little Mary were out on their own porch, watching with interest what was going on next door, fearing they were about to lose their little friends.

"Oh," cried Blanche, "there are our friends who've been so good to us and whom we love dearly. Uncle Albert, mayn't we run over and say good-by to them before we go?"

"Yes, certainly," he said. "I will go too and thank them for helping Ethel to send me word that you were not well treated or happy here."

It had been a hasty farewell, as it was near train time, and some tears were shed, but Mr. Eldon tried to comfort them all with the hope that the separation need not be for so very long, inviting the ladies and little Mary to visit his nephew and nieces at his house, and promising some day to bring Ethel, Blanche, Harry, and Nannette to see them.

CHAPTER XIII.

For more than an hour after his brother's departure Mr. George Eldon was very busy in his office, buying and selling ; then came a lull for a short space, giving him time to think again of Ethel's letter and what might be done to secure a kindly welcome for the little orphans at his own house and that of his brother.

"Albert will be back with them before night, and our wives ought to have warning that they are coming. It would be hardly fair to take them entirely by surprise. I promised my brother too, that I would endeavor to prepare them for the unexpected arrival," he mused. "Well, I think I can spare the time now as easily as later."

At that instant the door into the counting room opened and his eldest son came in.

"Ah, George," said the father, "I was just about to call you. I am going up home to see your mother and aunt, to tell

them of the contents of this letter," handing Ethel's missive to him as he spoke.

George took it, glanced rapidly over the contents, then turning to his father with flushing cheeks and flashing eyes, "The inhuman scoundrel!" he exclaimed, "You will take the poor little things away from him as soon as possible, I hope."

"Yes; your Uncle Albert has gone for them and will doubtless have them here before night. I must go up home at once with the news, leaving matters here in your care until I get back."

"Yes, sir, I think I can attend to them to your satisfaction," returned the son. "And I hope you will find mother and Aunt Augusta entirely willing to take those poor little orphans in to share our homes. That Coote has always seemed to me a fawning hypocrite, and I am sure of it now."

"I am of pretty much the same opinion, and he shall never again, with my consent, have an opportunity to abuse those little ones, or an- child committed to my care."

There had been some changes in Mr. George Eldon's family in the last two years. A fall on the icy pavement one winter day had so injured Mrs. Eldon's spine as to make her a cripple for life, never able to leave her room unless carried from it. At first she felt the trial well-nigh unendurable, but gradually she had grown submissive; gentle, patient, and resigned; thankful too for the blessings still hers—a good home, kind and affectionate husband, sons, and niece, a competent and efficient housekeeper and abundant means. Also that she still had the use of all her senses, her hands and eyes, so that she could read, sew, and crochet, making herself useful to her family and helpful to the needy.

In the family of Mr. Albert Eldon there had been little change except such as time inevitably brings to all; the boys and girls were growing up, Albert and Arabella were beginning to go into society, and the younger ones had a governess, Miss Annie West, who also gave lessons in music and the languages to Dorothy Dean, Mrs. George's niece.

Mrs. Augusta still devoted much of

her time to novel-reading and what she deemed the claims of society, yet paid a little more attention to those of household, husband, and children.

Mrs. George, in an easy-chair and propped up with cushions, was busily crocheting when she heard the front door open and shut, then her husband's step on the stairs.

"Ah! I wonder what brings George home at this time of day?" was her mental exclamation, and as he entered by the open door of her room she turned toward him with a welcoming smile.

"A pleasant surprise, my dear!" she said.

"Yes, to me as well as yourself," he said, returning the smile. "How are you now? Free from pain, I hope."

"Yes, quite comfortable, thank you. Ah, I see you have a letter," as he drew it from his pocket, at the same time taking possession of a chair close at her side.

"Yes, from my little niece Ethel." And without further preface he began reading it aloud.

"Why, the poor little things!" she

exclaimed when he had finished. "We must send for them, George, and provide them with a better home, either here or elsewhere. I never thought the Cootes could be so cruel."

"No, nor I. The letter came this morning. My brother and I were roused to indignation by its perusal, and he has gone for the children—will have them here, I confidently expect, sometime this afternoon."

"Thep shall be welcome," she returned. "Fortunately Mrs. Wood is fond of children, and I dare say, being two years older, and having been so cowed and kept down, they will be much more easily managed than they were before."

"Yes, I hope so; and you need have no trouble whatever with them; our good housekeeper and Dorothy can certainly do all that is needed. Will you order the necessary preparations, or shall I?"

"I do not want to take too much of your valuable time," she replied, "so, if you like to trust Mrs. Wood and me, I will talk matters over with her and get her to do what is necessary."

"Very well, then, I will go at once to

Augusta with the news, that she, too, may have time for needed preparations."

He found Augusta in her dressing room, the older three of her daughters and Dorothy Dean engaged in examining fashion plates and discussing weighty questions in regard to what materials they should purchase for their fall dresses, and in what style they should have them made up.

"Ah, I see I am interrupting a solemn council," said Mr. Eldon with playful look and tone, "but do not be too much distressed; I shall take but a very few minutes of your precious time, my own being equally valuable." With that he opened and read aloud Ethel's letter.

All present seemed excited to indignation, Dorothy perhaps the most of any.

"The poor little things!" she exclaimed. "Uncle, do have them brought here at once, even if we must take the whole four."

"We'll not let you do that. We'll do our share," said Mrs. Augusta. "I should never have been in favor of sending them to the Cootes if I had dreamed they could be guilty of treating the poor

little creatures with such barbarous cruelty."

"No, nor would any of us," said Arabella. "Has papa gone for them, Uncle George?"

"Yes, and will probably have them here in a few hours. I did not want you or my wife taken by surprise, Augusta, so came up to forewarn you of their expected arrival. And now I must hurry back to my business; so good-morning to you all," and with the last word he bowed himself out of the room.

"Dear me, what a shame it is!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I'd just enjoy having that cruel wretch of a Coote thrashed within an inch of his life."

"I, too," said Olive. "How I wish papa and Uncle George had found him out long ago; still more that they had never given him a chance to abuse those poor children."

"I'm afraid we were none of us quite so kind to them as we might have been," said Arabella, "but now we are going to have a chance to make it up to them."

"Yes, remember that, all of you," said their mother. "Minnie, go and tell Miss

Norris I wish to see her at once if she is at leisure." Minnie hastened to do the errand, the housekeeper came, listened with evident interest to the story of the little orphan nephew and nieces expected to arrive that afternoon, received Mrs. Eldon's directions in regard to the necessary preparations, and at once set to work to carry them out.

So the little party, arriving in due time, received a hearty welcome in both families and were made very comfortable, very happy; for though domiciled in the two houses, they were together a great deal through the day. Also they enjoyed their studies under the tuition of the kindest and most patient of governesses.

Mrs. Wood too was very kind to Blanche and Harry; so were their uncles, Cousins George and William, and Dorothy Dean. They seldom saw their Aunt Sarah, but when they did, found her far kinder than she had been when they were with her before. So were the relatives in the other house also, and to the four young orphans life was far more enjoyable than it had been since the death of their parents.

Yet there were days when things went wrong with them and they longed for a home of their own where they could all be together. Ethel in especial looked forward to such a time, and tried to learn all she conld that would enable her to earn money to make a home and support herself and the others; and when any one of them was in trouble, she tried to cheer and comfort that one with the hope that some day the bright dream would become a reality.

She still indulged a faint hope that some day they would find, or be found by their maternal grandparents; but lest they should not, she was careful not to slacken her exertions to prepare for self-support. She was obliging and helpful by nature, and her older cousins soon fell into the habit of calling upon her to do their errands about the house, then occasionally at the stores, and to assist them in dressing for parties and calls, at length making quite a Cinderella of her. Her dress was simple and inexpensive, while they wore silks and rich laces and diamonds. She bore it all without murmur or complaint, making herself as useful as

she could, never confiding her plans and wishes to them, but using her spare moments for the beautiful needlework taught her by Mrs. Coote, hoping that at some future time she would be able to dispose of it for money which would help in the carrying out of her plans for the future of herself and dear brother and sisters.

Thus two years passed, bringing no remarkable event. Then one October day—it was in the year 1859—Ethel, who had continued to feel a great interest in the history of the country she now esteemed her own, was much excited by the conversation she heard going on among her older relatives, who were discussing the exciting topic of the raid of John Brown into Virginia, and his seizure of the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry.

She was only a listener to the talk, but afterward she searched the newspapers for information on the subject, and felt very sorry for John Brown because he lost his life in trying to set men free, which she thought was a noble thing to do—for to be a slave must be very dreadful, and

surely God had given everyone a right to freedom, unless he had forfeited that right by some dreadful crime.

It was a time of great excitement among the Eldons as well as others; the sons, who had been born in America, feeling it even more than their fathers, who were but naturalized citizens. But they, as well as their boys, were opposed to slavery and anxious for the preservation of the Union.

George and William, the sons of the older Mr. Eldon, were frequently in at their Uncle Albert's, talking over the subject with him and his oldest son Albert; and George at length noticed the deep interest taken by Ethel in all they were saying.

"Well, little coz," he said at length, "what do you think of it all?"

"Oh," she returned excitedly, "I do hope this great, grand big Union won't be broken up! Do you think it will, Cousin George?"

"Oh, no," he said with a reassuring smile. "The Southerners are only talking, I think; they would hardly be so foolish as to begin a war when the far greater

part of the Union would be opposed to them."

"Oh, I am glad to hear that!" she said with a sigh of relief, "for war must be a dreadful thing."

"Yes; especially a civil war."

"Civil?" she returned in a tone of surprise. "I thought civil—was—was—I understood that it was right and good manners to be civil to people."

"Ah, yes," he said, smiling and patting the small hand she had laid on his knee, while gazing earnestly and enquiringly into his face; "it sometimes means to be courteous, polite, well-bred, but when applied to war it means a fight between people of the same race and country."

"And a dreadful kind of war it is when brother fights against brother," sighed his father, sitting near. "But I can hardly think it will come to that in this case. I think there are few besides the leaders in the South, who would be willing to imbrue their hands in the blood of their brethren."

"And they are not oppressed, uncle?"

"No, not by any means; they have

been having only too much of their own way and domineering over the rest of the nation. Slavery has had by no means a good effect upon them; it has made them proud, haughty, heartless, selfish, and cruel."

"No," said her Uncle Albert, "they have been the oppressors rather than the oppressed; caring only for getting and keeping wealth and power for themselves, and treating their fellow-citizens of the North as beneath them; 'the mud-sills of the North,' they are calling us."

"It is easy to call names," remarked William; "that sort of warfare requires neither courage nor talent; and so long as they content themselves with that the North will, I think, let them alone severely; but let them secede and attempt to set up a separate government and it is at least doubtful if the loyal North will continue to let them alone."

Ethel listened eagerly and her fears were relieved for a time. But the very next day came the news that South Carolina had seceded, and it seemed no one could tell what would follow. The daily papers were read with eager inter-

est. The Southern leaders seemed to be crazed, and whirled their States out of the Union one after another without pausing to learn the wishes of the rest of the people; many of whom were strongly opposed to their action and certainly had as indisputable a right to remain in the Union as those leaders to go out.

Ethel hardly understood what was going on, but continued to read the papers and listen to the talk of her elders with a dazed and confused feeling that a great danger was drawing near.

But one Saturday evening, April 13, 1861, news came flashing over the wires that almost struck the hearers dumb with astonishment and dismay. This was the despatch: "Fort Sumter has fallen after a terrific bombardment of thirty-six hours."

People heard it with sinking of hearts. Was the Union to be destroyed? Was it, could it be possible, that those who should have loved and honored the dear old flag—the beautiful, starry emblem of our liberties—had so insulted it? It was a bitter thought, and men wept as at the loss of a dear and honored friend.

The Sunday that followed was a sad one; but by Monday morning a reaction had come; at whatever cost the nation should live was the verdict of the people; the President had written with his own hand a proclamation, and the telegraph was flashing it east and west to every city and town:

"I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, in virtue of the power in me vested by the Constitution and the laws, have thought fit to call forth, and do call forth, the militia of the several States of the Union to the aggregate number of seventy-five thousand, in order to suppress this combination against the laws, and to cause the laws to be duly executed."

At the call patriotism awoke and showed itself in a furor of love to the Union and the flag as the emblem of its power and glory, and rapid voluntary enlistments for its defence followed, soon furnishing more troops than the President had called for.

The young men in the Eldon families were as full of patriotic excitement as any others, George and Albert being among the

first volunteers in their State, their fathers giving a ready consent, mothers and sisters also, though many and bitter tears were shed over the parting, by Ethel as well as the nearer relatives, for she had grown to love them both, especially her cousin George.

Then the mothers and older girls joined the aid societies and busied themselves with work for the soldiers—making shirts, knitting stockings, scraping lint—and Ethel, full of interest for the cause and of pity for those who must do the fighting for the Union, spent as much time as could be spared from lessons and waiting upon her aunt and cousins, in sharing in those labors; doing so gladly and without any urging or solicitation; she only wished herself old enough to be a nurse, since, being neither boy nor man, she could not enlist as a soldier.

The younger children, too, were anxious to help and took such part in the work as their tender years permitted. It was hoped the war would not last very long; almost everybody thought it would be over in a few months; yet no one could be certain that his or her dear ones might

not be killed or sorely wounded in the meantime, or that the struggle might not be prolonged far beyond the time for which enlistments were made at the start.

Mrs. Weston and Mrs. Keith had not forgotten the Eldon children or ceased to feel an interest in them, and occasionally Ethel had a letter from one or the other, which she answered with great painstaking, telling frankly such news of herself, brother, and sisters as she thought they would care to hear.

A letter from Mrs. Weston came for her about the time that her cousins left with the other Philadelphia troops in response to the President's call, and from it she learned that Mr. Keith, too, had enlisted; also some of his brothers living in Indiana.

"And now," continued Mrs. Weston, "we women who cannot do the fighting, are banding together to do all in our power to add to the comfort of our soldiers engaged in the struggle to save our dear country from being rent in pieces. We expect to be very busy, but not too busy to be glad to see you and your brother and sisters if you are al-

lowed to pay us a visit this summer. Mrs. Rupert Keith will probably be with us for a time, perhaps all summer, but that need not interfere with a visit from you little folks."

That invitation Ethel and the others were allowed to accept in the summer vacation. How much had happened meantime! the attack on the Massachusetts troops as they passed through Baltimore in response to the President's call; the seizure of Harper's Ferry and Norfolk Navy Yard, besides several battles, some in the East and some in the West.

And the very day of their arrival at Mr. Keith's came the sad news of the battle of Bull Run, speedily followed by the President's call for three hundred thousand more men to suppress the rebellion.

It was a time full of excitement, of almost heart-breaking distress, over the disaster, followed by the determination that the rebellion must and should be crushed, cost what it might.

Mrs. Rupert Keith was in sore anxiety and distress till the welcome news arrived that her husband, though in the

battle, had been neither wounded nor taken prisoner. The other ladies, though in deep distress for the land they loved, were suffering less keenly than she, as they knew that Mr. Donald Keith was too far West to have been in the battle.

Ethel and Blanche wept bitterly, fearing that their cousins George and Albert had been in the fight and were killed or wounded. But in a day or two a letter from Dorothy brought the welcome news that though among the troops engaged, they had escaped unharmed.

CHAPTER XIV.

As the war went on and Ethel heard frequent allusions among the older people to its great expense and the rapid rise in the price of all the necessaries of life, she felt an increasing desire to be able to support herself, and her brother and sisters. Except to them she said nothing to any one of her relatives of that ardent wish, though constantly revolving plans in her mind and asking help of God to carry out some one of them.

She was so young, however, that for several years praying, thinking, and trying to learn every useful art that those about her could teach, was all she could do.

Every summer she, Blanche, Harry, and Nannette had the great pleasure of a visit to Mr. Donald Keith's; and to the ladies there Ethel opened her heart, earnestly asking advice as to her future course.

Both replied, "You are too young yet

to go into any kind of business, and are doing the right thing in trying to learn all you can." That gave her great encouragement, though she felt it hard to wait, and often wished she could grow up faster.

The Cootes had moved away in less than a year after the children were taken from them, and another and very different man, with a lovely wife and several children, had taken charge of the church and possession of the parsonage; all of which added very much to Ethel's enjoyment of her visit to that neighborhood.

Both there and at home the war was ever the principal and most absorbing topic of conversation; each victory for the National arms brought joy—alas! not unmingled with poignant regret, often almost heart-breaking sorrow for the slain—to each family. George and Albert Eldon were in many engagements, both were wounded at different times, yet they escaped without loss of life or limb. First one and then the other came home on a short furlough—for they had re-enlisted for the war—were made much of by friends and relatives, their parents and sisters in

particular, and wept over anew when at the expiration of their time of leave they went back to rejoin their regiment; for they belonged to the same one.

Mrs. Keith or her mother occasionally wrote to Ethel. In March of 1865 a letter came, telling the young girl they would be in the city the next day to get a sight of Mr. Rupert Keith—who had been at home for a time, a paroled prisoner, but was now returning to his regiment, having been exchanged—and of his nephews, Percy Landreth and Stuart Ormsby, lads of seventeen, who had just enlisted and were with their uncle on their way to the seat of war—and inviting her to meet them at the station, as they would like to see her and felt sure she would like to see the soldiers, who were ready to give their lives for the salvation of their country.

Ethel was delighted and easily obtained permission to go.

The troops dined in Philadelphia, and the Keith party had time for a brief interview with their relatives and friends with whom Ethel was. She was introduced to and shook hands with them. She was

pleased with the looks of both uncle and nephews, and their evident ardent devotion to the cause of the Union for whose defence they had enlisted.

She and others watched with tear-dimmed eyes as again the troops took up their line of march for the South, keeping step to the music of the band. Would they ever tread those streets again? or were they doomed to die on some battle-field, or starve and freeze in those filthy prison-pens of Andersonville, Belle Isle, and Libby? Ah, who could say? And when would this dreadful war be over?

The last soldier had disappeared from sight, and with a sigh Mrs. Keith turned to Ethel.

"We have a little shopping to do, my dear," she said; "so will have to bid you good-by unless you may go with us and care to do so."

"Thank you, ma'am, I think I must go home now, when I have done an errand or two for Aunt Augusta and Cousin Adelaide," replied the young girl. "But aunt told me to invite you ladies to go home with me to dinner. Won't you?

"No, my dear; we must finish our

shopping and hurry home to our little folks, who are sure to be wanting mother and grandma. Take our thanks to your aunt, and tell her we hope to see her at our house one of these days."

So the good-bys were said, and the two ladies walked away in one direction and Ethel in another.

She visited several of the larger stores, making small purchases with which she had been entrusted, then turned into a side street and was pursuing her homeward way, when passing a drygoods retail store some little fancy articles in the window attracted her attention, and she went in to look at them more closely and price them.

She was waited on by a middle-aged woman of very pleasing countenance, with whom she presently fell into conversation. There were ready-made articles of women's and children's wear on the counter and in the show case, and in the back part of the store was a sewing machine with a partly finished garment upon it.

"I see you have some very pretty aprons and other ready-made things for

children," remarked Ethel, "and you make them yourself, I suppose?" glancing toward the machine as she spoke.

"Yes, miss, but I don't get much time for sewing since I have no one but myself to tend the store; except when mother finds time now and then to wait on a customer. That's not often, though, for the house-work and the children keep her busy pretty much all the time from daylight to dark."

"Then I should think it might pay you to have a young girl to wait on customers."

"Yes, miss, if I could get the right sort; but most young things are giddy and thoughtless, some inclined to be saucy to customers, and others not perfectly honest. I've had several that tried me in those ways; then I had a really good, honest, and capable one; but she had to leave because her father and brothers went off to the war, the only sister left at home took sick, and she—Susy, the one that was with me—had to go and help the poor mother to do the work and take care of the invalid."

A thought—a hope that here might be

an opening for her—had struck Ethel, and timidly she put a few questions in regard to the work required, the time that must be given to it, and the wages paid.

The woman answered her queries pleasantly and patiently, then asked her if she knew of someone who wanted such a situation and would be at all likely to suit.

"No, I—I am not certain, but I think perhaps she might if—if her friends won't object," stammered Ethel confusedly and with a vivid blush.

"Is it yourself, miss?" asked Mrs. Baker, the storekeeper, smiling kindly into the sweet, childish face. "I feel right sure we could get along nicely together if you're willing to make the trial, though to be sure you're rather young."

"Oh, I should like to," returned Ethel in eager delight. "I—I'm an orphan, and have a dear little brother and two little sisters, and I want to earn something to make a home for us all, so that we can be together and be independent."

"That's right; independence is a grand thing. But if it's not an impertinent question, where and how do you live

now?" asked Mrs. Baker, with a look of keen interest.

"We have two very kind uncles who give us homes—two of us in one house and two in the other. We see each other every day, but that's not just the same as living together."

"Well, but, dear child, you couldn't support four—yourself and two others."

"Not now, but maybe after a while, if—if I learn how to make money and work very hard and don't spend any more than is really necessary."

"Your wish to do all that does you a deal of credit, but I'm afraid you can hardly accomplish so much. My husband is gone to the war, and it's almost more than I can do to make a living for mother and the children and myself. So you see I couldn't pay a big salary to a young thing like you or to anybody; especially till you, or whoever it was, had learned something of the business."

"Oh, no, certainly not! But I'd willingly work for a little till I learn enough to be really worth more," returned Ethel half breathlessly; for she seemed to see some hope—some prospect of an opportu-

nity to begin her long-desired effort to attain to the little home she and Blanche, Harry and Nannette, had been talking of for years.

"Well, I like your looks, and—perhaps we might try it," Mrs. Baker said after a moment's cogitation, "though I'm afraid maybe your folks may not be quite willing."

Ethel colored at that. "I think I'll try it, if you are willing," she said. "I think I could sell goods—wait on customers, I mean, make change, and all that; and I know how to use the sewing machine—we have one at my uncle's where I live, and I've learned on it. So I could help with that, if you want me to. Indeed, I'd try to make myself so useful that you wouldn't want to get rid of me," she added with a smile.

"I don't believe I should," returned Mrs. Baker pleasantly. "Well, you may come and try it, if you like."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Ethel, her eyes shining. "When shall I begin?"

"To-morrow, if you like; but if you're really decided to come we'd better settle

about the terms. You'd expect to board and sleep here, I suppose?"

"I suppose so, if you want me to," returned Ethel with a sigh, thinking of Nannette's distress on learning that she was to be left alone at Uncle Albert's.

"Yes, I'd rather you would," said Mrs. Baker. "I've a right nice little bedroom for you opening into mine. Shall I show it to you?"

"Yes, if you please."

They went into the back part of the house, leaving the store in the care of Mrs. Ray, the mother of Mrs. Baker, up a narrow winding stairway and into a small room opening on one side into the hall, on another into a larger bedroom. Everything looked neat and clean, but the furniture was scant and plain, by no means an agreeable contrast to the room Ethel now occupied at her uncle's, or indeed with any room in his large and commodious dwelling.

Ethel was conscious of some sinking of the heart at the thought of the not pleasant exchange, but independence was sweet; still sweeter the thought of getting even one step nearer the realization

of her dream of the little home of their own for herself, brother, and sisters.

And it was quite as good a room—as well furnished at least—as the one they had occupied at Mr. Coote's.

Mrs. Baker could almost read the young girl's thoughts in her speaking countenance.

"I dare say your room at your uncle's must be far better furnished and larger than this," she remarked. "I wish for your sake I had a nicer one to offer you."

"But one can't have everything in this world," returned Ethel, forcing a smile, "and I had rather be independent even in a small and poorly furnished ten by ten room than living on somebody else in a palace."

"That's a right feeling, I think," said Mrs. Baker. "I don't have any great amount of respect for folks that are willing to live at other people's expense when they might take care of themselves."

With that she led the way down the stairs and into the store again, where they continued their talk till they came to a definite arrangement. It was that

Ethel should come in a day or two and try how she liked the business, and how well she could suit her employer. She told of the needle-work she had been doing at odd moments for the past years since her return to the city, and of which she had now accumulated a large supply, and asked if Mrs. Baker would like to buy them of her for sale in the store.

"I don't know," was the reply in a meditative tone. "Bring them along if you like and let me see them. I'm inclined to think your better plan would be to buy some muslin and make up the garments; then sell them on your own account here in the store; you may do it and welcome."

"Oh, thank you! how kind you are!" exclaimed Ethel joyously. Then with a promise to be there early the next day, she bade good-by and hastened on her homeward way in a flutter of excitement. She was, oh, so glad that at last a prospect was opening before her of being some day able to earn money for the support of herself, and her brother and sisters. And how delightful that she could at once relieve her uncles of all expense for her

own maintenance. They would surely be pleased that she was to become at once self-supporting; for only a day or two before this she had overheard some talk between her cousins Arabella and Olive in which they spoke of the expense their father and uncle were at in supporting their orphan cousins, pronouncing it a shame that it should be so now when everything was so costly in consequence of the war.

It had made Ethel feel very badly, and greatly increased her longing desire to be able to earn her own living; and surely, taking all this into consideration, her uncles must approve of the effort she was about to make.

And it could hardly be worse to work in that store for so pleasant and kind a woman, as Mrs. Baker evidently was, than to be expected to wait at all times and seasons upon her aunt and cousins, meekly receiving and obeying all their orders, and bearing fault-finding and scolding without retort or remonstrance, no matter how unkind and unjust she might feel it to be. The only hard part would be the separation from her brother

and younger sisters, particularly Nannette, who was so accustomed to lean upon her and had been so long her special charge. The tears would fall as she thought of that.

But suddenly realizing that she had certainly been out much longer than she had expected, and would probably be assailed with a torrent of reproaches on her arrival at home, she hastily wiped away her tears and quickened her steps.

Her reception on her arrival was even worse than she had feared.

"Mrs. Eldon wants you up there in her dressin'room right away, Miss Ethel," said the girl who opened the door and admitted her in answer to her ring.

"Very well," Ethel replied, and tripped lightly up the stairs, though her heart beat at the prospect before her.

She found her aunt lying idly on the sofa in her dressing gown and slippers, her hair in curl papers, and a paper-covered novel in her hand. "Well, miss," she exclaimed, "a pretty time you have been gone, leaving me lying here with nobody to read to me; for your cousins are all too busy of course, and not one of

them has a voice so well suited to allay the nervousness that drives me so nearly distracted."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Augusta," replied the young girl in a patient tone. "I did not mean to stay so long, but I had some errands——"

"Oh, did you match that lace?"

"Yes, ma'am," Ethel answered, taking a little roll from her pocket. "Here it is."

"Then make haste and carry it to the sewing room, and tell Miss Finch to baste it in the neck and sleeves of that new black silk of mine. Then leave your hat and sack in your own room and come here and read to me."

Ethel, though longing to go in search of Nannette, from whom she must part, in a large measure, so soon, also to consider and gather together what she would need to take with her to Mrs. Baker's, obeyed the order without any show of reluctance, and spent the next hour in reading to her aunt.

By that time Mrs. Eldon had fallen asleep, perceiving which the young girl stole silently from the room and went to her own.

But she had scarcely reached it and shut herself in when the door was opened again by someone on the outside and Arabella put in her head, asking, "Where's that sewing silk I told you to get me? and the buttons? did you match them?"

"Yes; here they are," returned Ethel, taking them from her pocket and handing them to her cousin.

"And why did you not bring them to me at once when you got home?"

"Aunt Augusta has kept me busy ever since."

"You are not in her room now, are you?" queried Arabella sarcastically.

"No, but I have just come from it, and I really forgot all about the purchases for you, Arabella."

"Well let me advise you not to forget so readily another time," was the haughty rejoinder, and Arabella hurried away; but Ethel heard her remark to Minnie and Olive as she went into the room across the hall, "That girl isn't worth her salt, and papa doing everything for her —feeding, clothing, and educating her. Really it would be a fine thing for him

and us if she'd show spirit enough to go off and earn a living for herself."

"She's too young," said Olive, "papa wouldn't think of letting her do it; and after all she is quite useful to us—doing many a little job of mending and fixing that we wouldn't care to do for ourselves."

"Well, yes, she does; but if she were not here we'd do them ourselves and papa would be saved that much needless expense."

"Needless?"

"Yes; for she is now old enough to earn her own living. There's many a younger girl than she doing that."

"Nonsense! you know well enough that neither papa nor Uncle George would let her do it," Ethel heard her cousin Minnie exclaim; but then, with a sudden recollection that she was hearing what was perhaps not intended for her ear, she closed the door with tears of wounded feeling rolling down her cheeks, and began her work of gathering together articles of clothing and other things she must take with her to her new abode.

She was glad that she had said positively

she would go, for if her uncles should object she could tell them she had made a promise and must be allowed to keep it. Yet, oh, how she dreaded the telling!

At the six o'clock dinner she was very silent and a close observer might have detected traces of tears on her cheeks, but her uncle's thoughts were upon the news of the day and some business transaction, and he failed to notice anything peculiar about his little niece.

On leaving the table he went into the library and took up the evening paper. His wife and older daughters had gone to their own apartments to dress for an evening party or concert, the younger children to the playroom, and he was alone till Ethel stole quietly in after him.

He glanced up at her as she drew near his chair.

"What is it, Ethel, my dear? have you something to say to me?" he asked pleasantly, "something you want no one else to hear?" Then noticing how her color came and went, that her eyes were full of tears and she was trembling visibly, "Why, what is it, child?" and he drew her near to his side, put an arm

about her as he spoke, and bade her not to be afraid to tell him all that troubled her.

"Oh, uncle, you are so kind!" she sobbed, the tears now rolling down her cheeks; "I do love you so, but—but I can't bear to stay here and be such an expense and burden to you when you have so many children of your own to provide for and I ought to be earning my own living."

"Tut, tut, who has put all that nonsense into your head?" he asked in a tone of mingled amusement and irritation. "I won't have it. I am entirely able to take care of my brother's little girl as well as my own. So stop crying, dry your eyes, and be as happy and merry as you can, nor ever think that uncle grudges you your home, victuals, and clothes."

"Oh, I don't, I don't think that, dear Uncle Albert," she said, putting her arms about his neck and kissing him with ardent affection; "but I'm almost a woman now and I want to earn my own living and, as soon as I'm able, to help my brother and sisters; and, and—oh, please don't be angry with me, but I—I've made

an engagement to be a clerk in a little store with a very nice kind woman who will treat me just like one of the family and——"

"Is it possible, Ethel!" exclaimed Mr Eldon, and his tone was full of displeasure. "Indeed I shall allow nothing of the kind. Let my brother's daughter go into a store? No, indeed! not while I have abundant means to support her as well as my own family.

"But, uncle, I've promised," sobbed Ethel, "and you know we must keep our promises."

"I dare say the woman will release you from the promise; at least for a consideration, if not without. Ah, here comes your Uncle George," as just then that gentleman entered the room.

"What do you think, brother? This foolish child has—without consulting you or me, or anybody else for that matter—engaged herself as clerk to a woman keeping a little thread and needle store."

"Well, that's astounding news!" exclaimed Mr. George Eldon, seating himself and looking very hard, with something of a frown on his face, at Ethel.

"Come here, child, and tell me all about it."

Ethel obeyed, wiping her eyes and saying pleadingly, "Please, uncle, don't be angry with me. I—I can't bear to be such an expense to Uncle Albert now when I'm getting so old, and so——"

"Ay, yes, very big and very old," he returned, taking her hand and drawing her to him; "so big and so old that it must cost a great deal to feed and dress you. Uncle Albert ought to be very glad to get rid of such an expense. And you are never of any use; don't do any errands for Aunt Augusta or her daughters or make yourself useful in any way." He looked so grave and spoke in such a serious tone that Ethel felt puzzled.

"I have tried to be of use, uncle," she said humbly, "but I know they can do very well without me. And I want to learn to make money, so that I can help Blanche and Harry and Nannette; because after a while it will cost a great deal to clothe and feed and educate them; and you and Uncle Albert have your own children to take care of."

"Well, really! she's not so much of a

baby as I had thought," he said, looking searchingly into her face with a grim sort of a smile on his own. "How old are you, Ethel, my sage niece?"

"In my sixteenth year, uncle. So you see I'm not a baby but almost a woman."

"Ah, well! let us hear all about these plans and prospects."

Thus encouraged, Ethel went at once into all the particulars of her interview with Mrs. Baker, what she had engaged to do, and what she hoped to accomplish. Her uncles listened attentively, and finding they could not persuade her to a willing relinquishment of her project, finally consented to allow her to make the trial; stipulating however that if she found the exertion too great, or for any reason was unhappy or uncomfortable in her new quarters, she should at once give up the effort at self-support, and return to her present home; Uncle Albert assuring her of a warm welcome there.

CHAPTER XV.

From the library Ethel went up to the schoolroom, where Nannette and the younger cousins were engaged with their tasks for the morrow.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come at last, Ethel, dear," said Nannette. "It always seems lonesome without you, and besides I want your help with this lesson; it's so hard, and you always know how to explain things and make them easy."

Ethel's eyes filled. What would Nan, dear little Nan, do without her big sister, who had always tried to bear every burden for her? But conquering her emotion by a great and determined effort, she took a seat by her little sister's side and gave the needed help.

The children were required to study only one hour in the evening, and soon books were laid aside and they ran off to the nursery for a game of romps before going to bed. But Ethel lingered behind,

and Miss Olney, the governess, presently enquired in a kindly tone if there was anything she wanted to say to her. Then Ethel's story came out, and with tears she confessed that the hardest part was the leaving of Nannette without her sisterly care and assistance with her tasks.

"Never mind that, dear child," Miss Olney said, softly stroking the young girl's hair; "I will take your place in that. And though I am sorry indeed to part with so docile and industrious a pupil as yourself, I think you are doing just right; and I believe the Lord will bless and help you. And you know you will not be far away and we may hope to see you frequently. From what you tell me of Mrs. Baker I feel assured that she will prove a kind and pleasant employer, making you feel yourself just one of the family—not a stranger about whom they care nothing. Also I think the knowledge that you can come back to your home here at any time if you will, sure of a welcome from your kind uncle—and I dare say all the family—will make it all the easier for you to be happy in your new surroundings."

"Yes, ma'am, my uncles are very, very kind to me, to my brother and sisters too; and Harry and the girls can come to Mrs. Baker's sometimes to see me; any of the rest of course, but I hardly suppose my aunt, uncles, or cousins will care to do that."

"But possibly I may, one of these days," returned Miss Olney with a smile.

"I'd be delighted to see you," Ethel said, her eyes shining. "Oh, I don't think I need feel unhappy or as if I were alone in the world. Would you tell Nan about it to-night, Miss Olney?"

"No, I think not. Let her sleep in peace. I wouldn't tell her until after breakfast to-morrow."

Ethel intended to act in accordance with that advice, but on going to her own room found Nan there standing with her eyes fastened upon the trunk her sister had been packing.

"Why, what's this trunk doing here?" she asked. "Are we going away, sister? Oh, I hope it's to visit at Mr. Keith's again, though I didn't suppose we'd be going there so early in the season."

"No, we are not, Nan, dear," returned

Ethel in trembling tones, and catching her little sister in her arms she held her close, kissing her again and again while the great tears rolled down her cheeks and sobs almost choked her.

"O, Ethel, what's the matter?" cried Nan in affright. "Oh, don't say you're going away from me! If you are going you must take me along, for I could never, never do without you! You know I couldn't."

Ethel struggled with her emotion, and presently finding her voice, "I'm not going very far, Nan, dear," she said with a fresh burst of sobs; "and I ought not to cry for it's best I should go—it will be the best in the end I'm sure, and our uncles are willing."

"Going where?" asked Nan wildly. "Oh, you shan't go! I can't do without you, you know I can't!"

"But it's to make the home for you and Blanche and Harry and me; besides, I'll not be far away and we can often visit each other, and when at last we get the dear home, oh, how happy we shall be!"

"But where are you going? and how do you expect to make the home?"

In answer to that Ethel told the whole story, winding up with, "You see, Nan, dear, it will not be so very hard; in fact, I think I shall like it very much—it will be so nice to feel that I am earning money toward the dear home we shall surely have some day. The worst of it is leaving you; but then it is not at all as if I were going far away; we can see each other very often, perhaps almost every day, and you can tell me all your little secrets just as you always have, and whatever I can do to help you I will. You're sure of that, aren't you, darling little sister?"

"Yes, yes; but oh, I shall miss you so much! I don't see what I can do without you."

"You won't be all alone, dear," returned Ethel soothingly; "the dear Lord Jesus will be just as near and able to help and comfort you as ever, and just as ready to hear your prayers as if you were a woman. You won't forget that?"

"No; but oh, I shall want you too!" wailed Nan, hiding her face on Ethel's shoulder.

"But, remember, I'm not going far

away, dear Nan, and we may see each other very often," repeated Ethel. "Besides, you will be here with dear Uncle Albert; and the cousins are almost always kind nowadays. Now let us kneel down and say our prayers and then get into bed and go to sleep, and you will feel better in the morning."

"O Ethel, is this the last time we'll sleep together?" sobbed Nan, creeping into her sister's arms as they laid themselves down upon the bed.

"For a while, I suppose," returned Ethel, trying hard to speak cheerfully. "But don't think about that, dear Nan, but about the good time coming, when we shall have our own home—all four of us together—and oh, such a good, happy time!"

"But oh, it will be so long to wait," sighed the little girl, and Ethel felt like echoing the sigh, for her heart was very sore over Nan's distress as well as her own sorrow, that they must now learn to live apart, at least for a time. But both at length wept themselves to sleep.

The situation did not look very much brighter to them in the morning, and

there were traces of tears upon the cheeks of both when they took their places at the breakfast table.

Their aunt had not come down. She was seldom present at that early meal. But all the cousins except Arabella were in their places, and it seemed that all the older ones looked askance and with no very pleasant expression at her.

But her uncle said good-morning in a very kindly tone, and heaped her plate and Nannette's with the most tempting viands the table afforded.

Ethel's heart was very full. She ate with but little appetite and had finished her meal before any of the rest had satisfied their appetites. Her uncle saw it, and on leaving the table called her into the library, where he could speak to her alone.

"Well, my child," he said, "I hope you have thought better of it by this time and do not want to leave us."

At that Ethel's tears began to fall. "I'm sorry, oh, so sorry, to leave you, uncle," she replied, "but you know promises have to be kept, and I did promise to try it. So please don't be angry with me."

"I am sorry, like yourself, my dear child," he said; "but do not blame you. Perhaps it is best you should try the plan; for as you can come back whenever you wish, it will not be risking a great deal, and I fear you will never be content until you have made the experiment. Your aunt and cousins all know about it and naturally are rather displeased, thinking it a proof that you do not value your home here as you might."

"Oh, uncle, how can they think that! I am very, very grateful for your kindness in giving me such a home for so many years; but it would be asking too much of you to keep on supporting me and my sister Nannette now when I have grown old enough to do something for myself and may hope, if I begin at once to learn to make money, that in a few years I may be able to help her and Blanche and Harry till they too are able to earn their own living. Don't you really think, uncle, that it is what is right and best for me to do?"

"That is a question we need not discuss now, since you are decided to try it," he said, looking at his watch. "Well,

child, I must be off to my business now; so let me kiss you good-by, and do not forget that if you want to come back at any time, your Uncle Albert's door is always open to you—his dead brother's daughter." He took her in his arms and caressed her tenderly as he spoke.

"Dear uncle, you have always been so good, so good and kind to me!" she sobbed, clinging about his neck. "Oh, don't ever think for one minute that it's because I don't love you dearly, dearly, that I'm going away."

"No, I do not think that," he said soothingly, caressing her hair and cheek with his hand, "but if you come back soon to stay with me, I shall think that is a proof that you do love me."

"Indeed, indeed, I do!" she exclaimed earnestly, the tears coursing down her cheeks as she spoke. "And mayn't I come here to see you when I wish and can be spared from the store?"

"Certainly; and it is possible I may some day call in upon you. Give me your address."

She gave it, and he wrote it down in his notebook.

"How soon do you go?" he asked.

"I promised to be there by nine o'clock this morning," she replied.

"So soon? Well, then I think it will not be best for you to see your aunt before starting. She is not likely to be up and would not wish to be disturbed, and you will be in again soon. So just leave your good-by with the girls."

Ethel was well content with that arrangement, for she had dreaded the parting interview with Mrs. Eldon; besides she was pressed for time to finish her packing and take leave of the others.

The adieus of her cousins were very coldly spoken, and no interest shown in her new enterprise. That saddened her, though she had hardly expected anything else. But the parting with Nannette, who wept and clung to her in an almost frantic abandonment of grief and despair, was the hardest thing of all. Blanche and Harry also were much distressed over the parting, but forgot their own sorrow in efforts to soothe and comfort poor little Nannette. At last Blanche succeeded in doing so in a measure by promising that when they were out for their walk that

afternoon they would all go to see Ethel in her new abode.

"Oh, yes, so you must! That's a good idea, Blanche," exclaimed Ethel. "I don't think Mrs. Baker will mind, and I shall be just as glad to see you as you will be to see me."

"But are we sure to be able to find the place?" asked Harry, standing near. "Here, I'll write it down—street and number, I mean," taking a small blank book from his pocket as he spoke, "and then we'll be sure not to forget."

"That's right, Harry," Ethel said with a faint smile. "I think you are going to make a good business man, as Uncle Albert says." She gave the requested information, then a hasty and last good-by to each and hurried away, leaving Nannette in tears, the other two looking distressed and woe-begone.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ethel left her uncle's house in tears, but before reaching her destination had wiped them away and assumed an air of determined cheerfulness. Mrs. Baker gave her a kindly reception, said she was glad to see her, hoped she would never find reason to regret having come, and bade her sit down by the stove and get well warmed before taking off her hat and sack, for it was a cold, blustering March day.

"We'll not be likely to have much custom to-day," she remarked presently; "it's so raw and cold out that I should think folks that have no particular call to go abroad would be likely to stay at home. Perhaps it's a good thing for us, as we'll have time to look over the bits of needlework you were telling me of. You have brought them along, I suppose?"

"I put them in my trunk," replied Ethel.

"And that's come and been carried up to your room; and when you're right warm you may bring them down, if you choose."

Ethel presently availed herself of the permission, and Mrs. Baker and her mother, Mrs. Ray, both examined the work with interest. "I think they are very handsome indeed, and shouldn't wonder if she'd find a customer for them —some of them, anyhow—directly," remarked the old lady. "I never saw as pretty work done by one so young."

"I quite agree with you, mother, and hope she'll make a good deal on them," returned Mrs. Baker, with a pleasant smile into Ethel's face, now rosy with pleasure at their warm commendation of her work. "I advise you to keep on, Ethel, as you tell me you have been doing, using spare moments in adding to your stock, and I think you'll find it paying you well one of these days," she continued, addressing the young girl. "If you wish, I'll buy a piece of muslin for you some day soon when I'm out purchasing goods for the store. I think maybe I can get a better bargain than

you could, seeing you are so young and not used, as I am, to such business; then I'll help you with the cutting out of the garments, so that they'll be ready when you can find time to work on them."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am," exclaimed Ethel, tears of gratitude springing to her eyes, "you are very kind to me."

"Tut, child, I haven't done anything yet to speak of," laughed the kind-hearted woman. "But I want to do by you as I'd want anyone to do by my little Jenny, if she should ever be left fatherless and motherless, poor little soul!" glancing with moistened eyes at her four-year-old daughter, who was playing about the floor.

"Dear little thing!" Ethel said, holding out her hand to the child, who had paused in her play to look wonderingly from one to the other, "she reminds me of what my little sister Nan was when God took our father and mother to heaven."

"My papa aint gone dere," lisped the little one, gazing up into Ethel's face; "he's gone to de war to fight de rebs."

"Has he?" said Ethel; "so have two

of my cousins. Oh," turning to Mrs. Baker, "I hope this dreadful war will soon be over!"

"So do I," was the emphatic rejoinder; "or rather I wish it; things don't look so very hopeful just at present. But folks seem to think the new general may be expected to make better progress against the rebels than the others did, I think myself it's more than likely, considering what he has done out West."

"And we are all praying for him, that the Lord will give him wisdom and success with his plans, so that this awful war may come to an end, and the country be saved," said Mrs. Ray. "The men at the head of the rebellion have a great deal to answer for. They were not oppressed, but were dreadful oppressors—of the negro first, then of the whites both North and South, in order to hold on to slavery, which they found so profitable to their pockets, besides ministering to their wicked pride."

"Well, I am sure the backbone of the rebellion is broken now; they know it can't succeed, and I for one can't see how the consciences of the rebel leaders can allow

them to go on with the struggle—sacrificing so many lives to no purpose," sighed Mrs. Baker. "Now, Ethel, I will show you round the store and make you acquainted with the places of the different articles we have for sale, so that you will be able to find them when called for."

"And I must go and see to household matters," her mother said, hurrying away in the direction of the kitchen.

Ethel was kept very busy all day, except for a little while in the afternoon, when Blanche came with Harry and Nannette to see her in her new quarters.

Mrs. Baker received them kindly and invited them to come again for Ethel's sake, and though some tears were shed by the three girls at parting, they all felt better contented than they had before.

As the days, weeks, and months rolled on, Ethel was more comfortable and found things going more smoothly with her at Mrs. Baker's than she had dared to hope. Waiting upon customers was not repugnant to her, she was fond of her needlework, and not averse to using the sewing-machine; though Mrs. Baker was kindly careful not to let her do too much of that

last, lest she should injure her health; also she kindly contrived some errand for her every day, squares away from the store, that she might have the benefit of outdoor air and exercise.

And there were many exchanges of visits between herself and her younger sisters and brother; occasional letters from Mrs. Keith and her mother to be read and replied to, and interesting news from the seat of war, the daily papers being eagerly searched for it by Mrs. Ray, Mrs. Baker, and herself.

With what a thrill of horror they read of the awful massacre by the savage Forrest and his troops at Fort Pillow, taken by a resort to trickery under a flag of truce; the terrible battles of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor, and others of the sanguinary conflicts of that last year of the war of the rebellion!

These divided Ethel's attention with her needlework, waiting upon customers, doing errands for Mrs. Baker, and chatting with the little ones, who were a source of entertainment, and of whom there were two boys in addition to Jenny. They were but little fellows, going to school

until the summer holidays began, but full of fun and frolic when at home, and Ethel and they soon became fast friends.

One day early in the fall Ethel received a letter from Mrs. Keith, in which she told of the coming home of her husband, a paroled prisoner from Andersonville, where he had been for some time, suffering so terribly that his health seemed ruined for life. His parents and other near relatives in Indiana were anxious to see him, she added, and they had decided to go out there for some weeks, taking the children with them. She hoped the trip would prove of benefit to Mr. Keith, and that he would return home looking and feeling more as he did before going into the army, for now he was so pale and thin that it almost broke her heart to look at him and hear his sad story of the barbarous treatment he and his fellow-prisoners had received at the hands of their cruel jailors; then from that she went on to tell of the starvation, filth, exposure to the weather, and shooting down on the slightest protest, which made of Andersonville prison-pen a veritable hell upon earth.

Ethel read that part of the letter first to herself, then aloud to Mrs. Baker and Mrs. Ray, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, while her hearers wept with her.

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Baker, "God grant this cruel war may soon be over, and that my poor husband may never be a prisoner in the hands of those worse than savage men!"

"And oh, I hope my poor cousins, George and Albert, may escape it too!" exclaimed Ethel. "How very, very dreadful it is! how can men be so cruel? worse than any wild beast."

"Oh, hark!" exclaimed Mrs. Baker. "What is it that newsboy is crying? Atlanta taken? I must have a paper!" and she rushed to the door, beckoned to the lad, and in a minute was back again with the paper in her hand, and reading aloud to her mother and Ethel.

They rejoiced together in this new proof that the Union cause was gaining, the rebellion nearing its end.

Ethel had come to feel very much at home with these good women; though her wages were but small, she had succeeded so well in the disposal of the garments

she had made on her own account and adorned with the specimens of needle-work she had brought with her, that she felt in good spirits and very hopeful of being, at no very distant day, able to carry out her plan of starting in a business of her own and making a home for herself, her brother and sisters.

She was extremely desirous of doing that; yet she had become so attached to the two good women she was with that it gave her something of a heartache to think of leaving them.

She had thought she might be able to accomplish her desire at the end of her first year with Mrs. Baker, but her means were not sufficient, and all the friends she consulted esteemed her too young for such an undertaking; they also thought that while the war lasted she would not be so likely to succeed as in the better times to be hoped for at its close. So she waited and worked on with patience and perseverance, comforting herself with the thought of the future.

In April came the glad news of Lee's surrender, which virtually ended the war. It was glorious news to her and those she

was with, as well as to all other loyal Americans, filling their hearts with joy and gratitude to the Giver of all good; but alas! how quickly followed by intense grief and indignation over the cruel and cowardly assassination of him who had guided the ship of state through the breakers and the fearful storm that had raged about her, threatening her destruction for the last four years.

On Saturday morning, April 15, the news reached Philadelphia, telegraphed from Washington, that President Lincoln had been shot the previous night and had just died of his wound.

The early breakfast was over at Mrs. Baker's, the store was in order, and Ethel sitting behind the counter engaged upon a bit of needlework while awaiting the coming of customers. Mrs. Ray was busy in the back part of the house, little Jenny playing about on the pavement in front of the door, and Mrs. Baker had gone to market, taking the two boys with her.

As Ethel's needle flew in and out, her thoughts were busy with the glad news of a few days before—that Lee had surrendered to Grant.

"The war must be just about over," she said to herself, "and how glad dear, good President Lincoln and all the people that love the Union must feel! I don't think one wants to punish the rebels now, much as we have lost and suffered through the efforts of the Confederates to destroy it—the grand old Union—we just say 'They've given up now, and we will do all we can to help them to repair their losses and begin to prosper again.' But, oh, hark! what's that the newsboys are crying?"

With the last words she dropped her work and ran to the door.

The newsboy, drawing nearer, was literally crying, sobs mingling with the words, "President Lincoln shot——"

"Oh, what—what's that he's saying?" cried Mrs. Ray, rushing in from the back room and through the front door. "Here, boy, bring me a paper! Oh, it can't be possible that anybody'd be so wicked as to fire at the President! Was he much hurt?" as she took the paper from the hand of the weeping boy and gave him the money for it.

"Oh, ma'am, he's dead! he's dead!

He was shot last night and died just a few minutes ago. And they've murdered two or three more o' the big men in Washington," and with the last words, accompanied by a sob, the lad passed on, repeating his mournful cry.

"Oh, I can't believe it! I don't know how to believe anybody, even a reb, could be so wicked," sobbed Mrs. Ray, hastily glancing over the headings. "Yes, yes: here it is! but I can't believe it; it's surely a hoax; for who could be so wicked as to murder such a good, kind man as dear Mr. Lincoln?"

"I can't believe it either!" exclaimed Ethel, tears raining down her cheeks, "but read it aloud, won't you, Mrs. Ray?"

"I can't—I can't! the tears come so fast. You—you may," thrusting the paper into Ethel's hand.

The young girl did as requested, but with many a pause to wipe away the falling tears and check the sobs that well-nigh choked her utterance.

She had not finished when Mrs. Baker and her boys returned, all three weeping.

"Oh, mother, mother, so you've got

the news! I thought you would before we could get home, for it has gone over the city like wildfire, and almost everybody's heart-broken!" cried Mrs. Baker, laying on the counter a parcel she carried and wiping her streaming eyes.

"Not just everybody, mother; you forget that mean, bad woman we saw get paid off so well in the market," exclaimed Mark, the eldest boy, his eyes flashing through tears. "You and Miss Ethel should have seen it, grandmother. We were buying some fish for dinner, the fishwoman and everybody round talking about the dreadful news, and most of them crying to think of dear, good President Lincoln being murdered, when up came a woman dressed in her best—at least I should think it might be her very best—and she says to the fishwoman, 'How much do you ask for these fine shad? I'll buy one, for I'm bound and determined to have an extra good dinner to-day to show how delighted I am at the good news I've heard.' 'And what may that be?" the other woman asked. 'Why, that that old tyrant, Abe Lincoln, is killed!' and she'd hardly got the

words out when that big shad was flapping round her ears in the liveliest kind of a way; and it went on flapping till it was all broken to pieces, her face smeared with the fish, and her bonnet crushed and broken and soiled till nobody would ever want to wear it again."

"Just what she deserved," said his grandmother. "I can't pity her in the least."

"And nobody did," said Mark exultingly; "the crowd around just cheered the fishwoman, and groaned and hissed at the other, till she was glad to hurry away as fast as she could. There, mother, now you tell about what we saw and heard on Walnut Street."

"Yes," said Mrs. Baker. "As we were coming home along that street a servant girl was scrubbing off the pavement in front of one of those big, handsome residences, and, a gentleman going past, she hailed him with, 'An' it's the good news we've got this marnin', sor; that ould Lincoln's shot to death an' won't nivver——' But there he interrupted her, his eyes fairly flashing with

anger and his fists clenched. 'If you weren't a woman I'd knock you down!' he said in a tone as if it would be a great satisfaction to him to do it. Then the gentleman of the house came to the door (I had seen him step to the parlor window as the girl began her remark) and said in a tone as if he would enjoy knocking her down, 'You may consider yourself dismissed from my service, Bridget. You shall never enter my doors again with my knowledge and consent. I'll have your clothes sent out to you and you may go at once."

"I don't blame him," said a lady customer who had just come in; "it was exactly what she deserved. Think of anybody being so heartless as to rejoice in such a murder—the assassination of a man so patient and kind to all, desirous to have rebels forgiven who in any other country would be speedily executed for their attempt to destroy the government. People's hearts are very sore," she went on, weeping as she spoke, "and no wonder they cannot and will not stand hearing any rejoicing over this terrible calamity that has befallen the country—

the dear land just saved from the dismemberment which threatened it! They are draping the public buildings with black, putting all the flags at half mast, and tying them with crape. Men shed tears; some women will wear deep mourning as for a near relative; others rosettes of the national colors and black ribbon. I came in here to look for the ribbons needed for mine."

Ethel waited upon her and while she did so another customer came in on the same errand. Her eyes were also wet with tears.

"Oh, isn't it dreadful?" she sobbed. "I think I could hardly feel worse if I'd lost my own father. And to think that some folks talk of the awful deed as if they were delighted that it was done. The heartless wretches! They might know, if they had any sense, that the loyal people—who were just rejoicing that the dreadful fight was over and the country saved—can't and won't stand it. I don't know whether it's true or not, but I just heard that a fellow who was so heartless as to be openly rejoicing over the dastardly deed, was knocked down

for expressing his exultation and kicked along the pavement by the exasperated crowd till he was dead, and that a soldier shot down another such rejoicer at one of the depots and nobody made any attempt to arrest him for it."

"Oh, those are dreadful things!" exclaimed Mrs. Ray. "It is certainly wrong to kill a man for expressing his opinion; but they should have sense enough to keep such opinions and feelings to themselves while loyal people's hearts are so sore over this dreadful, dreadful thing."

"Well there is one comforting thought —that the dear man was certainly a Christian, ready to die, and is now done with all earth's troubles and trials," said Mrs. Baker, tears of mingled joy and sorrow shining in her eyes. "How sweet the rest and peace of heaven must be to him—so worn and weary as he was with the griefs and cares of the last four dreadful years. We must weep for our own great and irreparable loss, and for all he suffered before God took him home, but at the same time we may rejoice in the blessedness that is now his in that better land."

"Yes, indeed," responded the two lady customers, one of them adding, "I don't know how anyone can doubt that he was a Christian man, well prepared to die; for he certainly displayed a Christian spirit toward all—even the rebels who were his deadly foes and had planned to murder him on his way to his first inauguration. It must be a blessed change for him; but oh, what is the country to do without him!"

"Oh, ma'am, our God still lives," said Mrs. Ray. "He is our Rock and Refuge, a very present help in trouble."

"Oh, mother, all the stores are putting black over their doors and windows," exclaimed Mark, peering out into the street; "tying their flags with crape too. Can't we do the same with ours?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure," she replied. "I'll go at once and buy some yards of black stuff and we'll fasten it along under the windows of our second story and around the doors here."

"Get some crape for the flag, too," said her mother. "Here, I'll pay for it," taking out her purse as she spoke. "And hadn't you better lay in a fresh supply of

black, red, blue, and white ribbons for making the rosettes? I feel sure that a great many folks will be putting them on as a sign of mourning for him—the dear, murdered President!"

"Yes, mother, I'll lay in a fresh stock, and the sooner I get off to see about it the better; for I'm pretty certain that there will be a great demand for it before the day is over," replied Mrs. Baker—and hurried on her way.

A busy day followed—a day full of sad, heart-breaking excitement. Troops were in hot pursuit of the murderers—the one who had slain the President, and his confederates, him who had attacked Secretary Seward, and those who had aided and abetted them.

The newsboys' cry of "Extry! Extry!" was frequently heard, and the papers sold rapidly. All loyal hearts rejoiced that though evidently it had been the intention of the conspirators to slay Secretary Seward, perhaps General Grant also, both had escaped with life, though the secretary had been severely wounded by his would-be assassin.

Cavalry and a heavy police force were

speedily sent out in pursuit of the criminals, who were finally taken and brought back to Washington to receive the punishment due to their crimes—with the exception of Booth who, refusing to surrender, was shot and killed in the barn which he had made his hiding place.

When it was known that he was no longer at large, had not escaped with impunity after his awful deed—people seemed to breathe more freely, their hearts to be a little less sore, though they still mourned deeply for the loss of their martyred President, who was borne to the grave amid the tears and lamentations of almost the entire nation. There were few who did not mourn for him as for one very near and dear; one whose place could never be filled.

CHAPTER XVII.

Those were very bright faces which gathered about Mrs. Baker's breakfast table one morning early in the next June.

"Father's coming home from the war to-day!" cried the children exultingly; "the fighting is all done and father's coming home to stay."

"Yes," returned their mother, tears of mingled joy and thankfulness shining in her eyes. "Oh, how thankful I am that he has never been wounded or taken prisoner—to starve and freeze to death, as so many of our poor, dear soldiers did. Oh, children, let us thank God every day of our lives for that!"

"Yes, yes, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Ray. "You will all want to go and see the train come in with the soldiers," she added, "but I'll stay at home and get the best dinner for John that he ever had in his life."

"Thank you for that kind offer, mother, dear," said Mrs. Baker. "I'll be very glad to go and take the children." Then turning to Ethel, "And what are you going to do, young woman?" she asked in a sprightly tone.

"To go to the station to meet my cousins and the Keiths, if I can be spared," returned Ethel, with a smile that told of a light and happy heart.

"Yes, indeed, you are at liberty to go," was the kindly rejoinder; "I was sure you would wish to, and so have engaged your friend Carry Brown to take your place in the store here for to-day."

Ethel expressed her warm thanks, adding, "I will see that everything about the store is in perfect order before I go, and will show Carry the places of things likely to be called for."

"That will be well," returned Mrs. Baker, as they left the table together.

Ethel was flitting about the store, dusting and putting things in place, humming a tune in the gladness of her heart at the thought that the war was over and the poor, weary, homesick soldiers about to be restored to their dear ones—partic-

ularly that her cousins George and Albert, were expected among the arrivals that day —when, glancing through the window, she saw the postman coming.

She ran to the door to meet him. He handed her a letter bearing her own name in the well-known handwriting of her kind friend, Mrs. Donald Keith. Ethel hastened to break the seal and read the enclosed note.

It was a brief one, telling her that they —Mr. and Mrs. Keith—would be in Philadelphia that morning in time to meet the train from Washington on which their brother, Colonel Rupert Keith, and his wife and two nephews, Stuart Ormsby and Percy Landreth, were expected to arrive. They would probably be at the depot for an hour or more before the Washington train would come in, and would be pleased to have Ethel spend that hour there with them, if she could be spared from the store.

This was good news to Ethel, who had not for months seen Mrs. Keith, one of the best and kindest friends she and her orphan brother and sisters had ever known.

She made haste with what must be done before leaving the store to Miss Brown's care, then hurried to the depot, reaching it some minutes ere the train from New Jersey was due; so that she and Mrs. Keith had time for a good long chat before the arrival of that from Washington, bringing their homeward bound soldier friends and relatives.

It came at last, there was a joyous meeting between the Keith brothers and other relatives, then the young men shook hands with Ethel, remembering having met her before on their way to the seat of war.

As they told each other in after years, Ethel and Percy Landreth each noted a change in the other; both had grown in stature, she nearing beautiful womanhood, he thought, while the impression she gained of him, in the few minutes of their brief interview, was that he was becoming a noble-looking man, one of whom his parents, sisters, and other relatives might well feel proud; and she rejoiced for him and them, that he had escaped wounds and imprisonment in any one of those earthly hells—Andersonville, Libby, Belle-

isle, Danville, Charleston, Salisbury—and other notorious rebel prison-pens.

They were all eager for home and could not be persuaded to miss the first train that would carry them on their westward way; therefore the interview was brief.

Mr. and Mrs. Keith returned to their home by a train that left only a few minutes later, and Ethel, after a short but very joyful interview with her returned soldier cousins, went back to her work at the store.

She found the Baker family rejoicing over their returned soldier with joy too deep, on the part of the older ones, for anything but tears.

Mr. Baker proved a pleasant-tempered, kindly-mannered man, and in no way interfered with Ethel's comfort as a member of the family. He was a mechanic, and in a few days was working busily at his trade again, while his wife, with Ethel's assistance, still carried on her business.

Thus a year passed away during which Ethel gained in stature, in self-reliance, and knowledge of the work by which she hoped one day to support herself, and her brother and sisters. Her day-dreams were con-

stantly of the little home she longed and hoped to provide for them and herself.

Her friend Carry Brown had similar aspirations, and finally they decided to go into business together. Their means were not large, but their plan was to buy goods in small quantities and on short credit, paying for them partly by sales, partly by doing a good deal of machine-sewing; Ethel also to continue her fine needle-work as time and opportunity were afforded

They found a suitable place only a few squares distant from Mrs. Baker's, a small house with one room back of the store, which they decided should be their parlor, three bedrooms in the second story with an attic over them, a basement kitchen, a cellar, and a small dining room.

The house was in pretty good repair. They rented it, freshened the appearance of the rooms with some cheap but delicately tinted paper on the walls, putting it on themselves to save expense, bought a scant supply of cheap, second-hand furniture, oilcloths and carpets for the floors, and the necessary utensils for the kitchen and dining room. The house and its fur-

nishings were indeed small and mean in comparison with those of Ethel's uncles, yet she, her friend, brother, and sisters took very joyful possession of it one summer afternoon, feeling that at last they had a home of their own, and the next morning the store was open for customers.

Blanche, now in her sixteenth year, undertook the housekeeping under her older sister's direction and superintendence. They would decide the night before what they might spend on their three meals and what they wanted that would come within their means, and the next morning would make the purchases. Blanche liked doing the marketing, and she soon learned to economize and to prepare dainty little dishes at small expense, developing quite a talent for cookery.

They could not afford to keep a servant, and most of the housework as well as the cooking fell to her share; Ethel and Carry devoting themselves to making articles for sale in the store and waiting upon customers.

Harry and Nannette too made themselves very useful out of school hours,

doing errands and helping with the work about the house.

But Ethel did more than anyone else, so anxious was she to succeed in paying her way and making a living for them all. She was cheerful and happy, but greatly overworked; always very glad of the Sabbath rest, as they all were indeed, but eager to begin her labors again on Monday morning.

There was no one to watch over and warn her of the danger of overtasking her strength. Her uncles were so displeased that she was so determined to earn her own living and that of her younger brother and sisters, that they would not visit or assist her in any way, and naturally it was the same with their wives and children.

They saw nothing of each other on the Sabbath, Ethel choosing to attend a nearer church of the same denomination. They were all regular attendants upon the church services and at Bible-class and Sunday-school. Ethel and Blanche were in the same class and soon became greatly attached to their teacher, Miss Seldon, lovely Christian woman who was deeply

a interested in all her scholars, but especially in this little family of orphans, struggling so hard to make their own way in the world. It soon became no unusual thing for her to call at their humble little home, invite their confidence, and, being a woman of means, in the kindest and most delicate manner render them assistance when she discovered that they were in any financial difficulty. But of that Ethel, in her pride of independence, would accept very little.

Miss Seldon did not know how hard and constantly the young girl worked, therefore did not warn her, as she certainly would had she known.

So things went on for nearly a year—all working industriously, but Ethel bearing the heaviest end of the burden, both physical and mental; for it was she who must plan how to meet all necessary payments. Often on waking in the morning she found it required a great effort to rise, dress, and resume her daily duties, and at last there came a time when the effort to do so was utterly vain; she could scarcely stir, and to rise from her couch was an impossibility.

She called to Blanche, and with her assistance finally succeeded in getting into her clothes and crawling downstairs to the store. Her breakfast was brought to her there, and having eaten it she took up her needle-work, but it required a great exertion of will-power to do even that, while to run the sewing-machine was impossible.

"Oh, what ails me? what shall I do?" she exclaimed at length, dropping the work into her lap and clasping her hands together with a gesture of despair.

"You have been working too hard and constantly," said Carry, "and will just have to take a rest."

"I can't; there's too much to do," groaned Ethel.

"You'll have to have a doctor," said Blanche, her eyes full of tears. "But you must; you shall," in reply to Ethel's mournful, dissenting shake of the head. "I'll go this minute for that one round the corner—Dr. Jones; I've heard people say he's a good one."

"We can't afford it," sighed Ethel.

"We certainly can't afford to let you die, or break down so that you can't do

anything; so I'm going for him now, this minute," returned Blanche, snatching up her hat and putting it on as she went.

She was so fortunate as to find the doctor in and was back again in a very few minutes, bringing him with her. After examining and cross-questioning his patient, he pronounced the trouble utter exhaustion from overwork, and ordered entire rest for weeks to come. She must go at once to her bed and stay there, refraining from any exertion of mind or body.

He was very kind and sympathetic, half carried her up to her room himself, and saw her comfortably established there; then repeating his order to her to refrain from every kind of exertion of body or mind, and promising to call again the following day, he left her.

"Is there much the matter, doctor?" asked Carry, as he passed through the store on his way out.

"She is utterly worn out," was the reply. "With absolute rest she may, and I hope will, recover completely in time; but it is very important that she

should be relieved from all care and anxiety."

"I don't see how we are to manage that," sighed Carry to herself, as he passed out, and she said the same thing to Blanche when she came into the room a few moments later.

"I don't know either," returned Blanche, tears filling her eyes, "unless —unless my uncles will help us a little."

"I'd go to see them and tell them all about it, if I were you," said Carry.

"To be sure; that's just what I will do," exclaimed Blanche, brightening. "I've got to do some errands out anyway, and, after attending to them, I'll go right on to my uncles' store and tell—'my tale of woe,'" she concluded with a vain attempt at mirthfulness.

With that she ran up to her room and hastened to attire herself neatly for her errand. She had left Ethel in bed and alone, the physician having enjoined it upon her to go to sleep as speedily and soundly as possible.

Blanche found her uncles in their office. They looked somewhat surprised at sight of her, but greeted her kindly, asking if

she and her brother and sisters were all well.

At that Blanche burst into tears and sobbed hysterically for a moment.

"What is it, dear child?" asked her Uncle Albert, taking her hand and drawing her to a seat upon his knee. "I fear you are having a hard time of it, trying to support yourselves. Is some one of you ill?"

"Yes, sir; Ethel—Ethel has—has broken down," sobbed the little girl. "Oh, uncle, I'm so afraid she'll die! The doctor says she's all worn out; for she has just worked, and worked, and worked from early in the morning till late at night every day but Sunday; and she can't get out of her bed now—and—and oh, I don't know what we will do, for she's the head one that directs all the rest of us."

"Ah, she should not be so wilful," remarked Mr. George Eldon grimly. "However, you needn't fret, child; of course we, your uncles, will see that you do not come to want; that you are provided with all necessary things."

"Of course we will," said Uncle Albert, "and Ethel must do as the doctor ad-

vises—not exert herself in the least till he pronounces her entirely recovered. I will go back with you, Blanche, see Ethel, and do what lies in my power to make her easy in body and mind. And you may feel sure that none of you will be allowed to want for anything your uncles can supply."

"Yes, that will be well," said his brother, "and tell Ethel from me that I shall be round to see her before long, probably either this evening or to-morrow morning. But she is not to stay awake expecting me," he added with a slight smile. "Come here, Blanche, and give your old uncle a kiss before you go. There," putting an arm about her as she stood at his side, and kissing her affectionately, "don't fret, little girl, while you have two uncles able and willing to provide you and the others with whatever may be needful to make you comfortable."

At that moment his son George coming in exclaimed: "Why, is this you, Blanche? I have not seen you for months; and how you have grown, child!" and he bent down and kissed

her cheek. "Why, you have been crying! Is anything wrong with you or the others?" he asked. "I hope not, I am sure. I was thinking only this morning that I must hunt you up and see how you were getting along."

"Thank you, Cousin George," returned the little girl in tremulous tones; "we were doing right nicely till—till now that Ethel has broken down because—the doctor says it is because she's been working too constantly and hard."

"Ah! why, she shouldn't do that when we're all able and willing to help her. But don't fret, little coz; she'll probably be all right in a few days, and we'll tell her she must not work so hard any more."

"You're very kind, Cousin George," returned Blanche, smiling through her tears, "and so are my uncles, but we don't like to be a burden to them when they have so many children of their own to provide for, and it has seemed very pleasant for us to be all together in a little home of our own, even though it is very plain and humble."

"Well, yes, that's a very right sort of

feeling," he said, "and makes one all the more willing to help you."

"There, that must do for the present, George," said his father. "You can call round to see Ethel and the rest any time after business hours, but your uncle is going to take Blanche home now and see what is needed. Good-by, child," taking her hand for a moment and giving her a parting caress, "and don't ever be afraid to come to your Uncle George for help when you are in trouble."

"Good-by and thank you, uncle. Good-by, Cousin George, and do come to see us," she said, and slipping her hand into that of her Uncle Albert, they went out together.

Ethel had just waked from a comfortable nap when Blanche returned bringing their Uncle Albert with her.

The interview was a pleasant one, for Mr. Eldon was very kind, sympathetic and appreciative of the efforts his young niece had put forth in order to earn a living for herself and her sisters and brother; he praised her for it, yet added: "But now you see, Ethel, that you are too young and feeble for so great an under-

taking. However," noting with concern the cloud of care and disappointment his words called to her tell-tale countenance, "we will not talk any more of that to-day. Try, my dear child, just to dismiss all vexing thoughts; trust to your uncles to ward off from you, your brother, and sisters, all danger from want of means, and with a mind at ease get well and strong again as soon as possible. When you have accomplished that it will be time enough to think of those other matters."

"You are very, very kind, uncle," she returned with tears shining in her eyes. "I will try to put away anxious and vexing thoughts and trust in you—but still more in the Lord—till I'm able to work again."

"Only till you are able to work again?" he said with a slight smile. "Really I fear my niece Ethel has some obstinacy in her nature; yet that is not altogether a bad thing; it is much to be preferred to vacillation, I think; yet young people should be willing to be guided and controlled to some extent at least by older ones who have claims to their respect and obedience."

"Yes, sir, I acknowledge that," she said with a slight sigh, "and I intend to try to obey you and Uncle George in all that I can."

"That is right," he responded with a pleased look, "and remember you have no need to be troubled with anxious cares, for your Uncle George and I will see that you and the rest are provided with all necessary things. Now I will leave you to take another nap. Good-by, dear child," giving her a parting kiss; "I shall be in again in a day or two to see how you are getting along. Now, Blanche," as he and his younger niece left the room together, "show me about the house and let me see how comfortable you have managed to make yourselves."

Blanche obeyed very willingly, for she was right proud of Ethel's success in making so good and comfortable a home for them all, and Uncle Albert noted and commended all that was worthy of it, and made no remarks about the defects that he perceived. He said truly that he thought they had done wonders, while at the same time he mentally resolved that

if they persisted in staying there, many a comfort and convenience should be added to their slender store.

In taking leave he put some money into Blanche's hand, bidding her see that Ethel was well fed, for he was sure she needed nourishing food and rest more than anything else.

"Oh, uncle, thank you!" Blanche exclaimed, her eyes sparkling with delight. "Yes, indeed, I'm sure she does, and I'll see that she has it."

At that moment Nannette came rushing in through the store, Harry following.

"Oh, Uncle Albert!" they cried at sight of him, Nannette springing forward and holding up her face for a kiss, adding, "It's such a long while that I haven't seen you, and I'm so glad you've come to see us at last."

"Ah, little one! I thought you had forgotten all about Uncle Albert," he returned, giving the caress with hearty good will. "But how you have grown! Harry also," shaking the boy's hand heartily. "Well, I am just going, but I hope we will see each other oftener in the future."

With that he was hastening toward the outer door, when seemingly struck by a second thought he turned toward them again, saying: "Harry, my boy, put down your satchel of books and come with me. I want you to act as my errand boy for once in a way."

"Do you, uncle? Oh, I'd like to," cried the boy, hastening to obey.

"It strikes me that you are growing out of your clothes, laddie," his uncle remarked, with a scrutinizing glance down at Harry as they walked briskly along the street.

"Yes, sir," Harry returned, blushing, "I can't help growing fast, and of course Ethel can't make enough money to be always buying new clothes for me. But I can stand it," he added cheerfully, "and I hope one of these days I'll be able to make enough to dress myself and all my sisters, too."

"Great expectations, my boy," his uncle said with a smile; "but if you make use of all your advantages I dare say they may be realized some day. And by the way, Harry, if you do make yourself fit for the place, I'll take you

into the store one of these days, should you happen to fancy the business."

"Oh, uncle, will you?" cried the boy. "I'd like it so much, and I'll try my very best to qualify myself for it."

While this conversation was going on between Mr. Eldon and Harry, Blanche was giving Nannette a detailed account of the doings of that afternoon—her calling in of the doctor, the visit she had afterward paid to her uncles at their place of business and their Uncle Albert's call upon them, his talk with Ethel and then with herself as she conducted him over the house. Nannette listened to it all with intense interest, then, after a moment's silence, burst out:

"It's just too bad that Uncle Albert doesn't know how Ethel and I were always treated by his daughters—as if we weren't their equals; if he did he wouldn't blame Ethel for trying to make a home for us and herself. But she couldn't tell him, of course."

"No, no, indeed! I'm sure neither Ethel nor any of the rest of us would be willing to give him the pain of knowing about it; yet it does seem right hard that

for that reason we can't show him the reasonableness of our desire for a home of our very own."

"Yes," sighed Nannette, "it does seem hard, because it looks as if we were ungrateful to him for all his kindness; but maybe some day they'll feel sorry for treating us so and tell him of it themselves."

"I hope so," said Blanche, but her tone and the accompanying sigh seemed to indicate that the hope was but faint.

"I think I'll go up now to see Ethel," said Nannette. "I hope she's feeling better for uncle's visit."

"Yes, so do I," returned Blanche; "but I wouldn't go up just yet, she may be asleep; besides it's time for us to be getting supper. You'll set the table, won't you, while I make the toast and tea?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Nannette cheerfully, and they set to work.

Just as everything was ready for the meal, Harry came rushing in with a joyful little shout.

"Hello, girls! look at me!" and he danced about the kitchen, clapping his

hands and acting like one fairly wild with delight. His sisters looked up and uttered simultaneous exclamations of surprise and delight.

"O Harry, how fine—how nice you look! Why, where did you get that new suit?"

"It's a present from Uncle Albert!" exclaimed the boy half breathlessly, "coat and pants; and aren't they splendid? And this isn't all; he's given me a handsomer suit than this for Sunday. Oh, but he's a brick! now isn't he? And see what he's bought for Ethel and the rest of us," he added, stepping to the door and bringing in a good-sized basket. "I didn't show it at first, because I wanted your undivided attention given to my clothes."

"Oh! oh! such elegant grapes and peaches and pears!" cried Nannette, peeping into the basket; "and—and what's that at the bottom?"

"Why, what do you think?" laughed Harry.

"We'll have to take it out of the basket and the paper it's wrapped in, before we can tell," replied Blanche, pro-

ceeding to lift out the fruit and place it carefully on a large dish. "Oh, birds picked and cleaned all ready for the grid-iron! They must be for Ethel; and how good of uncle to buy them for her."

"He said they were for all of us," returned Harry, "that there would be enough for each of us to have one, and leave one for Ethel's breakfast; and to-morrow he's going to send us some more or something else quite as good."

"He's just as kind as he can be!" was Nannette's rejoinder, Blanche adding, "Indeed he is! I do love him and wish everybody had as good and kind an uncle."

"Some folks have fathers, and I suppose they do just as well as uncles," laughed Harry.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You have been gone a good while, Albert; I hope it was not because of finding the child ill?" Mr. George Eldon remarked enquiringly when his brother re-entered their office.

"She is worn out and a long rest will be very necessary, I think," was the reply in an anxious tone, "and I for one shall do what I can to make her take it. She is certainly a bright girl and one to be proud of, George. There are none too many who would exert themselves as she has done when they might live at ease, depending on relatives able and willing to care for them."

"No, I dare say not, but I have sometimes felt that I should prefer to have her a trifle less independent. But," glancing at the clock, "sit down and give me an account of your visit, and the state in which you found her and the others. I see we have time enough for a chat before starting for home."

The request was complied with, a consultation held as to how much, and in what way Ethel and the others should be assisted, then, still conversing together on the subject, the brothers started for their homes.

It was the topic of conversation at the dinner table at Mr. George Eldon's that evening, and Dorothy and the two young men seemed much interested.

"She is a brave, industrious little woman," said George. "I doubt if there are many girls who would have voluntarily undertaken all that she has."

"There are certainly a great many who wouldn't," said William, "and I own that I am more proud of her than of my very dressy, fashionable cousins next door."

"Or of the one sitting here, I presume," laughed Dorothy. "I don't blame you, Will; but perhaps I might try going into business too if your mother did not insist that she needs me here."

"Of course she does, and so do we," said her uncle. "There must be somebody to sew on buttons and strings and attend to various other small matters affecting our comfort."

"And certainly Dorothy deserves the credit of attending faithfully to those small but necessary matters," said George.

"That's true," said his brother, "and of making quantities of garments for other people besides. She's a regular Dorcas, as I've heard mother say more than once."

"Be careful, young men, or you'll have me so puffed up there 'll be no living in the same house with me," returned Dorothy with merry look and tone, "and then who'll sew on your buttons and strings?"

"We'll carry them to mother," replied William with gravity. "She can't go round the house and hunt things up, but we will do that part, and she'll be both able and willing to tack the things on for us."

"And you, of course, are not likely to tire of your part of the work," returned Dorothy, "nor ever to forget to hunt up the garments and carry them to aunt in good season to have them got ready for wear when wanted. I should really like to see that poor girl—Ethel," she contin-

ued presently. "I wonder if she would care to see me."

"I am going round there this evening —in about an hour from now," said her uncle. "Would you like to go with me?"

"Yes, sir; yes, indeed, if I may."

"I shall be pleased to have you," he returned, "as I am partial to ladies' society and your aunt cannot go with me."

"Have you told mother of Ethel's break-down, sir?" asked his son George.

"Not yet, but I am going up to do so now," Mr. Eldon replied, as they all rose from the table.

Mrs. Eldon heard the story with interest, her husband recounting to her all that his brother had told him of the little home Ethel had made for herself and the younger ones, its comforts and conveniences, and what was lacking in that line; also how completely she had overworked herself in her determined effort to provide for her little family.

"Now what can we do to help her?" she asked when he had finished. "She is worthy of help, for she has shown her-

self wonderfully brave, self-reliant, and industrious."

"She has indeed" he responded, "and must be prevented from beginning work too soon. I am going to warn her to be careful, assuring her that Albert and I will provide all that is necessary, at least until she has fully recovered her health and strengh; and I shall insist that she allows us to do so. Her father would certainly have done the same by my children had the situation be reversed; and so I shall tell her."

"Yes; and lest she should doubt my willingness to have you do so, tell her I think it no more than one brother should do for the children of another, if he finds himself as able as you are."

"Thank you, my dear. And now I will go at once that I may get back to you the sooner."

He found Dorothy ready, waiting for him in the parlor below, and they set off at once.

They were joyfully welcomed on their arrival at their destination. Ethel was surprised and touched at this evidence of feeling for her on the part of her Uncle

George and Dorothy. They found her awake, talked very kindly to her, showing much interest in her and the younger ones, but, perceiving that her greatest need was rest and sleep, left early, promising to come again soon. Her uncle bade her an affectionate good-by, telling her not to fret or worry about anything, but to take matters easily, trusting in Providence, and her uncles as His instruments. He took her hand as he spoke and left something in it, which on examination she found to be a five-dollar bill.

"How good in him!" she murmured; glad, grateful tears chasing each other down her cheeks.

"Uncle," said Dorothy, as they walked along together, "I think those children need some clothes; excepting Harry, perhaps. Did you notice what a neat, new suit he had on?"

"Yes; it was a present this afternoon from his Uncle Albert. It would be no more than my share to provide for the girls whatever may be needed."

"Well, uncle, if you'll furnish the money I'll do the work. Aunt and I have been working for the Dorcas society

—helping to clothe the poor—and it really seems to me that the needy ones of our own family have the very first claim."

"That is my view of the matter," he said, "and I am ready to pay for all the material you and your aunt may think it best to buy and make up for them."

"Oh, thank you, sir! Shall we not have a talk with aunt about it when we get home?"

"Certainly. She will be apt to know just what should be bought, and, if you like, you can do the buying to-morrow. I will furnish the funds."

On reaching home they went directly to Mrs. Eldon's room, gave a detailed account of their visit and the discoveries made regarding the needs of Ethel and the others, then of their plan for affording relief, of which Mrs. Eldon highly approved, and which she and Dorothy began carrying out the next morning.

The result was a joyful surprise to the three girls and a lightening of Ethel's burden of care which greatly assisted her recovery. She strove, and with some measure of success, not to think of business cares and anxieties for some days,

but as soon as she was able to be up and at work again, she proposed to her partner that they should go over their books, take an inventory of goods on hand, and find out exactly how they stood with their creditors. They did so and discovered to their dismay that, so far from having made anything, they were in debt.

"There," exclaimed Carry, "I shall just stop right here; for if we go on I'll only get deeper and deeper into debt."

"Oh, no!" said Ethel. "I see where we have made mistakes. We'll avoid them after this and will make something next year."

"I shan't try," said Carry, in a despairing tone. "You, of course, will do as you like, but I'm done with the business."

"I don't think I am," said Ethel.

"Then suppose you buy me out; I'll sell cheap," said Carry, forcing a laugh to keep from crying.

"Yes, if you'll wait a little for your money," replied Ethel, a sudden conviction coming to her that she could do better alone, as she and Carry did not

always agree in regard to the wisdom of proposed measures.

"Yes," said Carry, "I think it would be only fair that you should settle with the creditors first, and I know you will pay me as soon afterward as you can."

So it came about that Ethel was soon sole proprietor of the little store, and could manage all parts of the business to suit herself. She bought goods on short credit and was very careful to pay promptly. She did not know that her uncles privately went security for her, and was rather surprised to find the wholesale merchants with whom she dealt so willing to trust her to any amount, though she never bought very largely, being far too cautious for that. She managed so well that in less than a year she was entirely free from debt and had a good run of custom; for so pleasing was her manner, so thoroughly well done her work, her stock of goods so carefully selected, that those who bought of her once were very apt to come again; also to recommend her to others.

Her uncles were kind, though her con-

tinuance in business did not meet with their warm approval. Dorothy came in occasionally to see her and her sisters. Harry was given the half-promised place in his uncle's store, and Miss Seldon was a not infrequent visitor and customer as well. She was very kind, bought of them herself, and recommended the store to others. She would sometimes accept an invitation to stay and take tea with them, all esteeming it a delight to entertain her—she was so kind-hearted and showed such an interest in them and their affairs.

She was in easy circumstances, had travelled a good deal in this and in foreign countries, and her conversation was both interesting and instructive.

One evening a casual mention of having some years before spent a number of weeks on the island of Jamaica aroused a degree of excitement among them that surprised her.

"Jamaica!" exclaimed Blanche. "Oh, Miss Seldon, did you meet any of the well-to-do people? any of the rich planters?"

"Yes," was the reply, "I had letters

of introduction to several families and found them very hospitable; some of them most interesting and agreeable people. I particularly remember one old couple, of English descent, without children, I think—at least I did not hear of any—who made my visit of a couple of days very enjoyable, indeed."

"What was their name, Miss Seldon?" asked Ethel half breathlessly, for her heart was beating fast between a newly aroused hope and the fear that it might not be realized.

"Eyre," returned Miss Seldon. "But why do you ask? Oh, what is it?" for every face at the table had brightened visibly, and there was an exchange of rejoicing, exulting, excited glances.

"I think they must have been our grandparents," said Ethel, scarcely able to speak from emotion, "mamma's father and mother, whom we have never been able to find because we did not know their address. Oh, how glad—how glad I am!" and she wept for joy and thankfulness.

Harry and the others were scarcely less excited; they could talk of nothing else

while together at the table, but soon after leaving it, Ethel, taking Miss Seldon with her, accompanied by Harry as escort, set out for her old home to inform her uncles of the discovery just made, and ask their advice in regard to the best way of opening communication with her grandparents.

"This is good news, Ethel—at least I hope it will prove so," said her Uncle George when the story had been told; "but I am extremely doubtful if your grandparents are still living; for in that case they would surely have been hunting up their daughter's children. But we must set on foot such enquiries as will remove all doubt, and in case of their death recover for you and your brother and sisters any property they may have left."

At that Ethel's eyes filled. "I want my dear grandparents a great deal more than I do their property," she said.

"I have no doubt of that, Ethel," said her Uncle Albert, "but in case of their death the property will be yours by right, and not to be despised; and they of course would have wished it to fall to

their daughter's children rather than to anyone else."

"I should think so; yes, I am quite sure of it," she said, adding with a smile, "and it will be a great help to us all in getting a start in the world."

"Yes," he returned, "and for that reason I shall be very glad if it turns out that there is a good deal of it."

"We will make enquiries for you, Ethel," said her Uncle George, "and set about it at once. So you need give yourself no farther trouble, my dear."

"Thank you both very much, indeed, uncles," was her reply in a tone full of grateful affection. "I think, though, that I will write a letter to my grandparents to say how dearly I love them, and how I have longed ever since dear mamma and papa died to be with them in the sweet old home I can just remember, but did not write till now because of not knowing their address. Shall I not do so?"

"I do not believe they are living, child," replied her Uncle George. "Had they been, you surely would have heard from them in some way before this."

"But they have not known where we

were," she returned, tears starting to her eyes again. "So I think I had better write."

"Yes, do so if you wish. It cannot do any harm," said her uncle Albert.

Blanche and Nannette eagerly awaited the return of their brother and sister, and on their coming besieged them with questions, asking what their uncles thought and said, and what was going to be done to find "Grandpa and Grandma Eyre." Neither Ethel nor Harry was disposed to keep anything back, but the others were disappointed that there was so little to tell, and were almost indignant that it should be thought that their grandparents were dead. They urged Ethel to write at once and find out certainly whether they were or not.

"It is just what I intend doing," she said, "and now, if you will be quiet, I will set to work at once. I'll make my letter short, promising to write again as soon as we hear from them."

The letter was written, read to the others for their approval, and mailed by Harry before they went to bed that night.

Some weeks of anxious suspense fol-

lowed, then news was received of the death, some years before, of both Mr. and Mrs. Eyre. They had left property which their daughter's children heired, but only a part of it was recovered for them.

In the meantime the young people had talked much together of their dear old home in Jamaica, and the grandparents who had so loved and petted them in their babyhood; Ethel, at the request of the others, repeating again and again all that she could remember of the lovely place, and their life there, so different from that they were now leading, and, as they talked, the desire to return to that beautiful home and those doating grandparents grew apace.

It was therefore a sore disappointment when they learned that death had robbed them of the dear old people, orphaning them a second time. For the first few days after hearing the sad news they were almost inconsolable in their grief and disappointment, but gradually they recovered from that and felt glad and thankful because of their increased means; for though by no means sufficient

to free them from the necessity of exertion, life was made easier and advantages were secured which without it were beyond their reach.

A capable woman was found who took Blanche's place as housekeeper and cook, so that she could go back to school and resume her studies, and a young girl, who did errands and sometimes waited upon customers, was also added to the establishment.

CHAPTER XIX.

SEVERAL years had passed, bringing to the members of our little family scarce any changes except such as time brings to the young and growing everywhere. Ethel was more mature in looks and manners, Harry becoming quite manly in appearance, and in character also, the two younger girls were budding into lovely womanhood, Nannette being especially winsome in manner. They were all strongly attached to each other and made a very harmonious and happy little household.

But a change came: Nan took cold in the spring, and all through the summer was feeble and more or less ailing.

The others were troubled and anxious about her, but she was almost always cheerful, said there was not much the matter, she only felt languid and weak, but hoped to be strong and have more energy when the cool autumn weather

came. But alas! instead, her feebleness increased till at last she was forced to take to her bed. Then Ethel, greatly alarmed, at once let her uncles know, and without delay the best medical advice was furnished and everything done that loving care and solicitude could do to improve her condition. She grew a little better for a time, so that she was able to be about the house again, but never went out except when one of her uncles or cousins took her for a drive as they sometimes did.

They were very kind and affectionate, coming often to see her, even when the weather was such that she could not be taken out. Dorothy was frequently there too, sometimes in the capacity of nurse, when business or domestic cares kept Nannette's sisters away from the sick room, and showing herself very kind, thoughtful, and skilful.

Miss Seldon did likewise, evidently feeling deep interest in the young invalid; bringing dainties to tempt the failing appetite, and interesting books to make the time pass pleasantly.

Their pastor came too, and by his sympathy and kindness endeared himself

greatly to the little family. He succeeded at length in so winning Nan's love and confidence that she became very open and communicative with him; talking freely of her thoughts, feelings, and desires, her hopes and aspirations; and very gently and tenderly he, after a time, told her that her physicians thought it very unlikely she would ever be restored to health in this world, but was slowly and surely nearing that blessed land where the inhabitants shall never say "I am sick"; the land where pain and sickness, death, sin, and sorrow are unknown.

It was a new idea to Nannette, for she had looked confidently forward to final restoration to health, and for some moments she seemed stunned with surprise and affright.

"Do not be afraid, dear child," said the minister in tones tremulous with emotion; "remember those sweet words of the psalmist, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' Trust in Jesus—Jesus only—and He will be with you, and carry you safely through

the valley, and over the river of death, to the beautiful Celestial city, where you will dwell with Him in such bliss as eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

"And where my dear father and mother are," she said softly, the big tears coursing down her cheeks. "Oh, I shall not be sorry to go! How good; oh, how good the Lord is to let me go there so soon!"

"Yes, dear child. Is it because He sees any good in you, do you think?"

"No, sir; oh, no, there isn't any, not any of my own righteousness: but I think, I believe, oh, I know that He has covered me with the beautiful robe of His perfect righteousness, so that when God looks upon me He will see only that and none of the filthy rags of my own. And He will wash away in His precious blood all my sins, all the evil that is in me, and make me fit for a home in that blessed land. With Jesus and like him! Oh, how happy I shall be!" Then after a moment's pause, "Do my brother and sisters know?" she asked.

"I think not," he said, "though doubtless they will not be greatly surprised to learn the truth in regard to your serious condition."

"Then tell them; please tell them," she entreated; "Ethel and Blanche at least, and perhaps they will tell Harry when he comes home from the store to-night."

Just then footsteps were heard on the stairs, the door opened, and Dorothy entered.

"How do you do, sir?" she said, holding out her hand to the minister, then turning toward Nannette, "Ah, little coz, you are better, I think! Your cheeks are like roses and your eyes are very bright. What is it, dear?" as the beautiful eyes filled with tears, "are you in pain?" and she bent over her, softly caressing her hair and cheek.

The minister had slipped away unobserved. Nannette put an arm round Dorothy and drew her down closer. "I —I know it now," she panted. "He has told me, and—and oh, I—I'm afraid Ethel's heart will break, for—for she loves me so dearly!"

"What is it, dear? You haven't told me yet," returned Dorothy in half tremulous tones. "You—you are not worse?"

"I shall never be any better," faltered Nannette; "never till—till I reach that land where the inhabitants shall not say 'I am sick.'"

"O Nan, you don't know! I—I think you are getting better," Dorothy returned, tears streaming from her eyes. "And how could we ever do without you? I have grown to love you very, very dearly since I have been with you so much, seeing how dear and good and patient you are in all your pain and weakness. Cheer up, for I do think you will be stronger when the warm weather comes."

But Nannette shook her head. "No," she said, "the doctors say I will not be here long; that I am going home to heaven to be with Jesus and the dear father and mother who went so long ago. O Dorothy, though the news was like a shock at first, I am very glad now, if—if only I did not have to leave Ethel and Blanche behind; Harry too, and you and my uncles and cousins. Oh, how sweet it

would be if we could only all go together!"

"O Nan," cried Dorothy, weeping, "I can't help hoping the doctors are mistaken; you know they sometimes are, and perhaps you will get well yet. I'll tell Uncle George, and perhaps he will take you south to Florida or the West Indies. I think it would do him good to go himself, for he has a cough of late."

"You are very kind, Dorothy," Nan said with a grateful look up into her eyes, "and so are my uncles. I believe they would do anything in their power to save my life; but I fear it is too late, and if I am to die I'd rather die here at home with all the dear ones about me."

"But, O Nan, we can't go with you!" exclaimed a voice half choked with grief; "and how can we let you go alone!" for Ethel had come in unperceived and dropped on her knees close by the bedside. "Oh, my darling, darling little sister, what can I ever do without you? You have been my special charge almost ever since you were born. I don't know how I can live if you are taken from me!"

"You know the others will need you, dear," said Nan, clinging about her neck, "and papa and mamma and I will be waiting for you all on the other side of the river; and oh, what a happy time it will be when we are all there together!"

"But oh, darling, it seems so long to wait!" groaned Ethel, holding her close, and weeping as if her heart would break; "so long to live without you!"

"Maybe it won't be so long; perhaps He will soon let you follow me."

"When her work for Him on earth is done," said Dorothy, weeping with them. "But, Ethel, dear, you know He never sends a burden without the strength to bear it. Don't forget the sweet promise, 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be,' or the sweet assurance, 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.'"

"Oh, it is so easy to forget!" sighed Ethel. "I am glad you reminded me. I have need to pray as the disciples did, 'Lord, increase our faith.'"

A moment's silence, while the sisters, closely clasped in each other's arms, mingled their tears together, then Ethel

asked, low and tremulously, "Nan, dear, you are not afraid?"

"No, sister, dear, for though you can't go with me, Jesus has said that He will. Don't you remember those lovely texts in Isaiah, 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' I was reading those verses only this morning, and they seemed so sweet."

"They are for us both," sobbed Ethel; "for when I think of parting with you, my darling little sister, doing without you all the rest of my life—the waters seem very, very deep, the floods overflow me. Oh, what should I do if I had not Jesus to cling to?"

"'And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest,'" repeated Nan in low

tender tones; "'as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' I know it means Jesus, and if we cling close to him he will be all that to us."

"Yes; oh, yes! and you are clinging to him, Nan, dear?"

"Yes; oh, yes! I have no other refuge; and what other need anyone want? for 'He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.' You remember that Jesus said, 'And this is the will of Him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.' I believe; oh, I have not the least doubt that Jesus is God, that He is able and willing to save, for He invites all to come to Him for salvation—'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' I know I cannot do anything to deserve salvation—that all my righteousness is as filthy rags; but He has offered me His, and I have accepted it, so that now it is mine and I feel the truth

of what the Bible says, 'And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.' Oh, I am full of joy at the thought that I am so soon to be with Jesus and to be like Him."

"Yes, I am glad for you, dear Nan," Ethel said, amid her fast falling tears, "but my heart is almost broken for myself and our brother and sister; for we all love you so dearly that it will be terrible for us to see you go."

"Should we not let her rest now?" asked Dorothy gently. "She is looking very weary."

"Yes, I fear I have talked too long," returned Ethel, with an anxious look at the face on the pillow, "and it is time she had something to eat," and with that she left the room.

She found Harry seated in the little parlor below, looking over the evening paper.

"How is Nan?" he asked, glancing up at her as she entered. Then noticing that she had been weeping, "O Ethel, is she worse?"

At first Ethel answered only with tears

and sobs; then in low, tremulous tones she said, "She is nearing home, Harry. The doctors say she can be with us only —a little longer—a few weeks or—perhaps but a few days."

Harry had dropped his paper, and tears were coursing down his cheeks. "I don't believe it! Dear little Nan! we can't let her die. What could we ever do without her? something must be done to save her."

Blanche had come in just in time to hear Harry's last words, and was standing as if struck dumb with astonishment and dismay. "What is it? oh, what is it?" she asked wildly. "Nan can't be so very ill with that lovely color in her cheeks and her eyes so bright. Oh, I'm sure she'll soon be better! quite well, perhaps, when the warm spring days come and the flowers are in bloom." But tears fell fast from her eyes even as she spoke.

"It's an old saying that while there's life there's hope," said Harry, trying hard to make his tones steady; "so we'll just hope on, at the same time doing everything that can be done to—to prolong her precious life; for she's just the

loveliest and dearest little sister that ever anybody had."

"Yes," said Ethel, "and nothing is impossible with God. Oh, let us all three pray that she may be spared to us if it is best for her and for us. I must go now and get her supper ready and carry it up to her."

"It is ready now; broiled bird, toast, fruit, tea, and cake. I thought they would all taste good to her, and you know the doctors say she may eat anything and everything she fancies."

"That seems to show that they don't consider her so very, very ill," remarked Harry hopefully. "Let us all go up with the supper. I haven't seen her since morning, you know."

They did so, and were so cheerfully and pleasantly greeted by the dear young invalid that Harry was more than ever convinced that the doctors had sounded a false alarm.

The sisters too grew hopeful, Dorothy also, and they made quite a cheerful little party about the tea table; the maid-of-all-work sitting with Nannette while they all ate.

But not so with the uncles, to whom the same report of the doctors' opinion had been carried. They came in together just as the young people rose from the table, and though they did not express their fears, something in their air and manner remarked those of the others; Ethel's especially. She knew they had come to see Nannette, and quickly led the way to her room.

The face on the pillow brightened visibly on their entrance. "Oh, Uncle George and Uncle Albert," she exclaimed, holding out her hand with a bright, sweet smile, "how good in you to come to see me to-night! I'm so very glad to see you."

"Are you, dear?" said Uncle George, bending down to kiss the sweet lips. "I think not more glad than we are to see you—our own dear little niece; and if there is anything you want—anything that would add to your comfort—you must tell us so without the least hesitation."

"Yes, indeed, dear child," added Uncle Albert, caressing her in his turn, "we are ready and desirous to do anything

and everything we can to relieve and make you better."

"Thank you, dear uncles," she returned with a very grateful look up into their faces, "you are both so good and kind to me always. I don't know of anything more that I want, but I love you both so dearly, dearly. Please remember that, whenever you think of me after—after I'm gone."

"We won't think of that; we will hope to keep you for a long time, dear little Nan," returned her Uncle Albert, his voice betraying some emotion.

Nan gave him a look of yearning affection and slipped a hand into his.

"I know I haven't very long to stay in this world, dear uncle," she said softly, "but no one need be sorry, because I am not; for oh, it will be so sweet to go and live with the dear Saviour, free from sin and sorrow and pain. And I think it will seem only a very little while till all my loved ones will come to be there with me."

"God grant none of us may miss it!" he exclaimed low and feelingly.

"I'm very glad to find you so free from

fear of death," remarked her Uncle George, taking her other hand and holding it in a tender, loving clasp, "for it will be easier for you on that account, whatever the future may have in store for you. Try, dear child, just to leave the whole matter in the Lord's hands and be ready to go or stay as He may see fit to appoint."

"And if I am taken, you will try to comfort my dear sisters and brother, won't you, uncles? for I know they will be full of sorrow, for a time at least."

Both gave the promise she asked; then after a little more tenderly kind talk they bade her an affectionate good-night and went away, for they saw that she was weary and in need of rest.

But they and some of the cousins were there frequently during the few weeks that she lingered on this side of the river of death, doing all in their power to add to her comfort and happiness. But the nursing fell to Dorothy and the brother and sisters, who one and all esteemed it a privilege to be with and wait upon the patient, uncomplaining sufferer.

They were all about her when, one lovely spring morning, she passed away

to the better land, going so peacefully and quietly that they scarcely knew the precise moment when the redeemed spirit took its flight.

It was Dorothy who first perceived that the change had come.

"Dear blessed one!" she sobbed, her tears falling like rain as she bent down over the still form, laid a hand tenderly upon the cold forehead, and gently closed the eyes. "She has left us to be forever with the Lord, and is even now singing the song of redeeming love."

"Yes; it is a blessed change for her," sobbed Ethel, kneeling on the other side of the bed with one cold hand fast clasped in hers, "but oh, how can we ever learn to live without her!"

"Oh, how can we!" cried Blanche, weeping as if her heart would break, while Harry, with a groan of anguish, rushed from the room to lock himself in his own.

"Dear girls," said Dorothy softly, "be comforted with the thought that though she cannot come back to you—and oh, she would not if she could—you may one day go to her—to that blessed land where parting is unknown."

CHAPTER XX.

The uncles, themselves grieving over the departure of their dear young niece, were most kind to the bereaved brother and sisters; doing all they could to comfort them, attending to the arrangements and expenses connected with the funeral and the putting on of mourning by Ethel and Blanche.

Nor did they stop at that, but perceiving that the sisters were worn out with the long nursing, and needed rest and change of scene, counselled them to go away for a time, offering to bear for them all the expense involved in so doing.

A very kind and sympathetic letter had been received from Mrs. Keith only the day before, urging them to come to her for a few weeks, and now they decided to accept the invitation, closing their store and letting their maid-of-all-work take a holiday also.

Harry went with them for a few hours'

stay, then returned to his business, taking up his abode, for the time of their absence, in his old home at the house of their Uncle George.

It was at first something of a disappointment to Ethel and Blanche to find that Mrs. Keith had other guests than themselves—her husband's sister Mildred and her two daughters Marcia and Fanny—but a few hours in their pleasant society more than reconciled them to this unexpected addition to the little party; both mother and daughters proving very kind, congenial, and sympathetic; listening with evident interest to the loving remembrances of Nannette indulged in by the sisters and Mrs. Keith and her Mary.

The girls grew very intimate, and Marcia and Fan talked a great deal about their brothers Percy and Stewart and their cousin Stuart Ormsby, sometimes reading aloud portions of letters received from them. They talked of their home too, expressing a hope that some day Ethel and Blanche might visit them there, of their father, grandparents, and other relatives, in a way that showed them to be warm-hearted, affectionate, happy girls.

Industrious ones also they evidently were, very apt to have a bit of work of one kind or another on hand as they talked. Marcia had a decided and well cultivated talent for drawing, and when out driving or walking would often be taking a sketch from nature; at other times drawing designs for engravers or patterns for manufacturers of dress goods, wall papers, or carpets. Fan too employed much of her time in the same way, though her taste and talent seemed hardly so strong in those directions as were her sister's, and she proved a help to her aunt and cousins in remodelling dresses and bonnets and fashioning new ones. Blanche had her sewing also, and Ethel some of the fine needlework taught her years before by Mrs. Coote. They could not forget their recent bereavement, and often when alone together their tears would fall as they thought or talked of Nannette, rejoicing for her that she had safely reached the better land, but mourning for themselves that they would see her dear face no more upon earth.

Thus two weeks had passed and they were thinking of going home, when one

evening two young men walked in who proved to be Percy Landreth and his cousin Stuart Ormsby. Their coming was a surprise to all, but they received a joyful welcome. "I am very glad to see you, boys," their aunt said when greetings had been exchanged all round; "that is if you haven't come with the intention of taking sister Mildred and her daughters away from us."

"I must confess that that was our design in part, Aunt Flora," returned Percy, "and if you can't do without mother and my sisters we will gladly carry you back with us; indeed be rejoiced to do so whether you feel prepared to spare them or not."

"That is right, Percy," said his mother. "I should like nothing better than to carry the whole family—from your uncle Don down to the baby back with me and keep them there for a long visit. What do you say to it, brother?"

"Thank you kindly, Milly," Mr. Keith returned. "I should like dearly well to accept your invitation, but cannot leave my business just at present, yet am willing to spare wife and children to

you for a time, if mother Weston will come and keep house for me while they are gone."

"She is not here now?" Percy said half enquiringly, and glancing about as if in search of her.

"No; she has been with one of her other daughters for some weeks past," replied his uncle.

"Well," said Mrs. Keith, "let us just give ourselves up to the enjoyment of each other's society for to-night and settle all these questions to-morrow or later. Now, lads, tell us all about the dear ones left behind you."

"Especially my dear old father and mother," added her husband.

"We left them and all the others quite well," replied Stuart Ormsby, "and were sent off with many injunctions to bring Aunt Mildred and the girls back with us; also as many of you as we could prevail upon to come."

With that the conversation became general, though Ethel and Blanche did little more than listen. Ethel was thinking with some concern that the house would surely be very full now, and wish-

ing she had not delayed her return home. After a little she stole from the room, thinking she would at once make some preparation for departure early the next day; but Mrs. Keith had divined her thoughts, and followed her to her room.

"Ethel, dear," she said, putting an arm round the young girl's waist, "yours is such a tell-tale face that I know what you have been thinking of since the arrival of our nephews. But you need not be troubled; there is plenty of room for them and you and your sister also. There is a room in the third story, which can be made very comfortable for the lads —especially compared with their quarters when in camp during the late war—and I want you and Blanche to get well acquainted with them and know what bright, good, promising young fellows they are."

"Dear Mrs. Keith, you are and always have been so very kind to us, though we never had the slightest claim upon you," returned Ethel, grateful tears shining in her eyes; "but our visit here has already been longer than we expected to make it when we came. Besides I know so large

a family must cost a great deal in both work and money."

"Never you mind about all that," laughed Mrs. Keith; "we don't need to count the pennies, and must always expect to pay in more ways than one for the pleasures we have."

"Oh, please believe that I—I did not mean to be impertinent," stammered Ethel with a blush; "but I've had to count pennies almost ever since I can remember, and it has made me feel very reluctant to use up those of other people."

"My dear girl," said Mrs. Keith with a smile, "I'll forgive the impertinence if you will promise to stay another week or two."

It did not take much persuasion to win Ethel's consent, for she dreaded going back to the home where Nannette was not, and that seemed so desolate without her sunny presence.

The ten days or more that followed seemed to the young people to fly very fast in each other's pleasant society, and by the end of that time their acquaintance had progressed beyond what it

might in years of more ordinary intercourse. Percy and Ethel, Stuart and Blanche, felt that they knew each other well, had become mutually attached, and there was a double betrothal and a looking forward to a double wedding when a year or so should establish the young men more fully in business, increasing their means, and bring to the girls a feeling that the mourning garments, now worn in memory of Nannette, might be willingly and with propriety laid aside.

The relatives of the young men, including Percy's mother and sisters, were all pleased, for having for years heard a great deal of these young girls, through their New Jersey relatives, they felt that they already knew them well.

"Dear girl, I want you to feel that you are no longer motherless," Mildred said, taking Ethel into a close, loving embrace when Percy had told his story, in the privacy of her own room, "for I shall be glad to claim you as one of my daughters, as I am sure Percy's father will also; so that you must no longer feel yourself an orphan."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Landreth. It

will be, oh, so sweet, to have a mother again," returned Ethel in low, tremulous tones, "though I do not feel worthy of such an one as you."

"Quite as worthy as I am of such a daughter as yourself, dear girl," Mildred said with a smile and another caress; "one who has shown herself such a brave, capable, energetic little woman, preferring to earn her own living rather than to live idly dependent upon others."

"It is very, very kind in you to say that, dear Mrs. Landreth," returned Ethel with a blush and a smile. "I know there are many who would despise me for having worked with my own hands for my daily bread, as do even some of my own dear kindred."

"Well, dear girl, I should not let that trouble me, since God's command is 'Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work,' and Paul bids us 'Work with your own hands,' and again, 'This we command you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.' The Bible —and the Bible only—is our God-given rule of faith and practice."

"Yes, I have tried to make it mine,"

Ethel said, "and not to care for the cold and scornful looks of those who despise others who labor with their hands. I must go back to my work to-morrow," she added with a smile, "for I have now been absent longer than was intended when we left home."

"And I am going with her, mother, to ask her uncles' consent. She thinks they will give it without hesitation," he added with an admiring smile into the eyes of his betrothed; "and should they not, I will try argument and persuasion; which should be quite in a lawyer's line."

"Yes; but I hardly fear you will need to use much of either," replied his mother with a look that seemed to say anyone might be proud to claim relationship to her boy.

But a gentle tap on the door of the room interrupted the conversation at that moment, and at a quiet "Come in" from Mrs. Landreth, Stuart Ormsby entered with Blanche upon his arm.

"We have come for your blessing, Aunt Mildred, as the nearest representative of my father and mother," he said, turning a beaming face upon her, "for

this dear girl has promised to be mine; if her uncles do not object, which she assures me they will not. And, perhaps she will give herself to me even if they should prove so unreasonable and unkind."

"Don't be too sure of that, Mr. Ormsby," said Blanche demurely; "one should show great respect for the opinions of one's elders. Do you not think so, Mrs. Landreth?"

"Yes, dear child," returned Mildred, drawing the young girl to her and bestowing upon her a tender caress, "and I think we need scarcely fear to do so in this case; for my sister's son seems to his Aunt Mildred worthy to mate with the best and greatest lady in the land."

Stuart's eyes sparkled as he said heartily, "Many thanks, auntie; I could not ask for a higher recommendation than that."

"Now," said Mildred, leading the way, "suppose we go downstairs and see what your Uncle Don and the other relatives here have to say about it."

Uncle Don had no objection to offer, nor did he or anyone else seem other than

well pleased with the turn affairs had taken.

Ethel and Blanche returned home the next day accompanied by their suitors, who were not long in entering their plea with the uncles who, knowing all about them as relatives of the Keiths, and fellow-soldiers and intimates of their own sons during the last year of the war, at once gave a hearty consent, and claimed the privilege and pleasure of entertaining the young men during their stay of a day or two in the city of brotherly love.

Ethel and Blanche were also persuaded to become for a few days the guests of their uncles, and it was only after the departure of Percy and Stuart that they went back again to their own little home and reopened their store.

Harry returned to them, and it was hard at first to feel that Nannette would never again make one of the little family, yet gradually they learned to do without her dear presence and to go cheerfully about their daily tasks—the care of house and store and the making up of garments, daintily adorned, for the trousseaus likely to be wanted for the coming year.

Harry was not displeased at the prospect before his sisters, yet felt, and sometimes remarked, that their gain would be his loss. Hearing him talk in that way one day, his Uncle George said:

"You must come back to your old home with us, my boy, when your sisters go. And if that does not satisfy you, perhaps we may decide to open a branch house in their town and put you in charge of it."

"Oh, Uncle George, what a delightful idea!" exclaimed Blanche; "for then all our little family would be together."

"And you won't miss your uncles at all," he returned half sadly, yet with a faint smile, and laying a hand caressingly upon her shoulder as she sat on the sofa by his side.

"Oh, uncle, yes; yes, indeed!" she answered earnestly, tears springing to her eyes, "you have been so very, very good to us. And oh, I shall be sorry to leave Dorothy, who nursed Nannette so kindly and has been such a lovely comforter and helper to us in all our sorrow and cares."

"Yes, Dorothy is a good, kind-hearted, helpful girl," he responded, "almost as

dear to me as my own nieces; even the two who have no father to love and care for them."

"Dear uncle, it makes me feel very happy to hear you say you love Ethel and me. I don't remember that ever you told me so before, though I always thought you did—at least a little bit," Blanche returned, her eyes shining, while she ventured to put an arm about his neck and touch his cheek with her lips.

"A good big bit, my dear child," he said in reply, putting an arm about her and returning her caress with interest. "I hope you will be very happy in the new home which that young man is getting ready for you, but that you won't entirely forget your old uncles who have loved and tried to provide for their dead brother's children."

"Not dead, uncle dear, but only gone before to the better land," Ethel said in tones tremulous with emotion. "No, no, indeed; we could not possibly forget you or Uncle Albert, who has been so very kind to us; if we could we ought to be considered the basest of ingrates."

"I agree with you there, Ethel," said

Harry. "And Uncle George, I am delighted with the idea you have advanced. I think I should like nothing better ; and in case you decide to try the experiment I promise to do my very best to make it a success."

"Well, my boy, I will talk to my brother about it. Ah, here he is," as at that moment Mr. Albert Eldon entered the room.

"What was that you were talking of as I came in?" he asked when he had exchanged greetings with his nieces and taken an offered armchair.

At that his brother told of the suggestion he had made to Harry, concluding by asking his opinion of the matter.

"I think it might be very well to try it," returned Mr. Albert, "but we will be better able to decide that question after learning more about the place from Percy and Stuart ; their fathers too, who will probably be the better judges of the wisdom of such an undertaking."

"Very well, then, we will take the thing into consideration ; and in the meantime let you, Harry, make the needed enquiries," said Mr. George ; then turned

the talk upon other topics, asking his nieces what was the time fixed upon for the weddings.

"It is not fixed yet, uncle," replied Ethel with a blush and smile, "but we talk of some day early in June."

"The month of roses!" he said. "There is no lovelier time in the year to my thinking, and I hope weather and everything else may prove propitious. But what about the trousseau for each of you? Your Uncle Albert and I wish to provide that."

"Thank you very, very much, uncles!" exclaimed both the girls in a breath; "but we think you have already done more than we had any right or reason to expect."

"Not more by any means than we are disposed to do for our dead brother's children," he replied, Mr. Albert adding, "No, nor nearly so much. I will give each a hundred dollars to be laid out in that way."

"And I will do the same," added their Uncle George, "and I want the double wedding to take place in my parlor, Albert and I dividing the expense be-

tween us. We have talked it all over, calculating the probable cost."

"Oh, how kind and generous you are, uncles!" exclaimed Ethel, her eyes full of grateful tears; "but it will make so much work for——"

"No matter for that," interrupted her Uncle George with simulated gruffness. "Mrs. Wood and Dorothy will be only too glad of the opportunity to make a grand display of refreshments and so forth, and will enjoy seeing how the brides are dressed, how pretty they look, and how they behave—with what modest grace they carry off their honors. Besides your Aunt Sarah wants to see the ceremony and cannot well get out to look upon it in any other place."

"And there is no place that I should like better, uncle," said Blanche, her face beaming with pleasure. "It is my old home, where I was always so kindly treated by you, and no other place could be more like a father's house for me to be married from."

"But mine I hope would not be less like a father's house to you, Blanche?"

remarked Mr. Albert Eldon, looking affectionately into her eyes.

"No, uncle, dear, yours would be just about the same, for I cannot make up my mind which of you I love the best," returned Blanche, giving to him also a look of ardent affection. "I have only one regret in going away to my new home—that I must leave you two, and other dear relatives behind."

"That is my case also," said Ethel, "but we will hope for many a good visit from the dear ones we must part from for a time when we go."

"And the visits must be returned," said Uncle Albert, "and you two being so much younger than my good brother and I, must expect to give two to one."

"Yes, that would be only fair," said his brother. "Ah, Ethel, I hear that my prospective nephews are making ready some pretty cages for their birds."

"They are both building, sir," replied Ethel with a smile and a blush; "but the cages are to accommodate themselves as well as their mates, and each is to be a gift from the father of the future owner.

They have sent us the plans, and we are delighted with them."

"They are submitted to us for any alteration we may desire to suggest," added Blanche, "but we can think of scarcely any improvement. They are to be side by side, the gardens running together, and face the river, which we are told is a beautiful stream of clear, rapidly flowing water, the banks green to its very edge. And the houses of the parents of the male birds," she added with a merry laugh, "are less than a square away. Would you like to see the plans, uncles?"

The reply was a pleased assent from both, and she brought them. They examined them with evident interest, making favorable comments, asking some questions, and suggesting a few slight alterations which they thought would be improvements.

"Very desirable residences they seem likely to be," was Mr. George Eldon's comment when they had finished their inspection, "and I trust they will prove happy homes to my nieces."

"Ethel and I mean to try to make them such to their owners," remarked Blanche

with an arch look and smile. "Of course, having never seen the place ourselves, we can only take the word of those who have as to the beauty of the surroundings; but I feel sure I shall better enjoy gazing upon a beautiful, clear, swiftly flowing river, grass, flowers, and trees, than upon brick pavements and white shutters, white marble doorsteps and the like, so trying to the eyes."

"No doubt of it," said her Uncle Albert, "but life will have its troubles and trials, whether it be passed in city or country. You must not expect paradise, even in a snug little home of your own with a kind husband indoors, and clear flowing waters, flowers, and other lovely things outside."

"No, I do not, uncle," she said laughingly, "yet I cannot divest myself of the idea—the hope—that the contemplated change will be for the better, even if I have the troublesome charge of a man's happiness committed to my care; his happiness at least so far as a neat, well-kept home and well-spread table can secure it."

"Well, my dear child, though not every-

thing, they are a great deal to a man, and if you add a cheerful, sunny temper, and all needed care and attention to his comfort in other matters, I think he will be blessed with a happy home and a wife whom he can respect and love, probably with increasing affection as the years roll by, your own love for him increasing also."

"You are looking very grave, Ethel," he added, turning to her, "do you not agree with me in the sentiments I have expressed?"

"Oh, yes, sir; yes, indeed!" she answered in earnest tones, "and I have a very ardent desire, a very determined purpose to do all in my power to make a happy home for Percy—to be as good a wife and housekeeper as his mother is. I think there could not be a better, judging from all I have heard from him and the relatives we were with this summer—and I am resolved to learn all I can on those subjects from her. I wish you and Uncle George knew her, she is so lovely, so dear and good and kind. Oh, I think it will be delightful to be numbered among her daughters—especially after having been so long motherless.

"Yes; I am glad for you, my dear," he said, then turning to her sister, "But you, Blanche, it seems have not seen your future mother-in-law yet?"

"No, sir; but I am willing to risk the danger of finding her disagreeable, for Stuart has assured me she is no less lovable than his aunt, whom I like fully as much as Ethel does. Indeed *like* is hardly a strong enough word to express my feelings for either her or her daughters. I love them—all three of them—dearly."

"That is right," he said. "When do you give up here?" he asked, turning to Ethel. "Your year is out in April, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the wedding is to be in June. I want you to come to my house to spend the weeks that intervene. You can make your preparations there, having all the help you want from dressmakers and seamstresses."

"Don't take more than your fair share, Albert," said his brother; "a part of their time should be spent with us."

"But you are going to give the wedding. Ah, well! they may come and go

between the two houses as may suit their convenience and inclination, and you must let me bear my share of all the expenses."

"Yes, brother, we will have an amicable settlement when all is over," returned Mr. George as he rose to take leave, for it was nearing bedtime; and with an affectionate good-night to the nieces and nephew the two took their departure.

"Who has kinder uncles than ours?" exclaimed Blanche, as the door closed upon them. "It fairly gives me a heart-ache to think of going where I shall perhaps never see them again!" and she heaved a sigh which seemed to come from the bottom of her heart.

"Yes," sighed Ethel, "how few earthly pleasures there are that do not bring some sorrow with them. But oh! it will not be so in the better land, for the Bible tells us there shall be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain."

"And Nan is there; dear, dear Nan, so peaceful and happy! Oh, I am sure she would not come back to earth if she could," said Blanche softly, and wiping away a tear.

CHAPTER XXI.

DOROTHY came in the next morning soon after breakfast, looking cheerful and bright.

"You two girls are to come to our house directly after shutting up here," she said. "I arranged it all with your uncles last evening—that is Aunt Sarah and I; we both want you, and so do uncle and the boys. They say you have hardly been there to make any stay at all, Ethel, and that it is Blanche's old home; so of course you ought both to come, and we have coaxed Uncle Albert to consent. You see I told him I wanted to help with your sewing and that you could run in to have a talk with him in the evenings, or he come into our house; and as he couldn't see much of you at any other time—being down at his store all day—he finally gave up with pretty good grace and said I might have it my own way. I am sure it is only right that I should, for

I really care more about you than any of his girls do. Now tell me honestly wouldn't you be as willing to spend those last weeks with us as with them?"

"Well," returned Ethel with a smile, "I cannot deny that I should. I do not know which of my uncles I love best; and you, Dorothy, are more congenial and seem to care more for us than Uncle Albert's daughters. So I am well pleased with the arrangement you propose. It is very kind in you to offer your help with our sewing too."

"Yes, indeed," said Blanche. "You are more like an own cousin to us than any one of the girls in the other house; and I'm very fond of Uncle George and his boys; of Aunt Sarah too, for she has been really kind to us for years."

"Then you'll come to us?"

"Yes, gladly," returned both girls, Blanche adding, "I am sure it will be the best and pleasantest plan that could be thought of; especially as we can see about as much of Uncle Albert as if we were spending our days and nights in his house."

"Good girls!" said Dorothy. "And

you'll let me help with your shopping, won't you?" A glad assent was given to that, for Dorothy was an excellent shopper, and Ethel and Blanche felt that to have her taste and judgment to rely upon would be a great help to them. They said as much, and Dorothy looked highly pleased.

They were in the back part of the store, Blanche running the sewing-machine while Ethel busied herself with a bit of needle-work, for no customer was in at the moment.

"I don't think I have seen all you have been at work upon for your wedding outfits," said Dorothy.

"No," replied both girls, "we have not shown you nearly all," Blanche adding, "You take her upstairs and show her both yours and mine, Ethel. I will stay here to attend to any customer who may happen to come in."

"No, sister," said Ethel, "it would hardly be fair for me to have all that pleasure, leaving you to do all the work. I will show my own, then come down and let you go up and exhibit yours."

"Very well," laughed Blanche, "any-

thing to please you, sister mine." Then to Dorothy, "Isn't she the most unselfish girl you ever saw?"

"I never saw one who had less selfishness in her, and I think Percy Landreth a most fortunate fellow," replied Dorothy, giving Ethel a look of mingled admiration and affection.

"And I think I am the fortunate one," Ethel said with a joyous smile. "Percy Landreth is no common man, and how he came to fancy me passes my comprehension."

"Ah, there is no accounting for tastes, my dear," laughed Dorothy as they left the room together. "Ah, what lovely work!" she exclaimed as Ethel took garment after garment from a bureau drawer and spread them about on the bed, for her inspection. "You must have been very industrious to have accomplished so much in so short a time."

"No," said Ethel, "some of it was done months ago and intended for sale."

"Oh, yes; before your engagement?"

"Yes; you see I had no other employment for my fingers while chatting with Mrs. Landreth and the others in Mrs.

Keith's parlor or on the porches during the day. Of course in the evening, after sundown, we all gave our eyes and fingers a rest."

"But not ears and tongues, I presume," laughed Dorothy. "Well, it seems there will hardly need to be much more sewing done except on the dresses. The shopping for them will be very enjoyable, I think; for I dearly love to look at pretty things. Suppose we make a beginning this afternoon. The uncles will supply the needed money if we go down to the office for it. Indeed we can buy a good deal from them, telling them they are to let us have the goods at wholesale prices; and if they object that they are not retailers, we will consent to take them in wholesale quantities."

"That might do very well," Ethel said with a smile, "if you will engage to be bridesmaid and wear a dress off the same piece with Blanche's and mine."

"No objection in the world to that, if Blanche agrees to it," said Dorothy. "But what a pity your uncles haven't kept the kind of goods you sell! It might have been such a help to you. Now please

run down and send Blanche up to show me her pretty things. After that, if you like, we will start out on our expedition."

Ethel did as requested. Blanche's garments were displayed, and received as high commendation as those of her sister; then Ethel dressed for the street, and she and Dorothy started out for the proposed call upon the uncles, and the shopping that was to follow.

"Ah, young ladies, how do you do? Whatever may have brought you, I am pleased to see your bonny faces," was Mr. George Eldon's greeting as they entered his office, where they found him alone, his brother having gone out on some errand connected with their business. "Sit down and tell me your errand; for I presume you have one."

"Yes, uncle, we are out shopping for wedding dresses," returned Dorothy laughingly.

"And want some money, I suppose," he said, turning to his desk.

"Yes, sir, or goods; we would be willing to take a whole piece of white silk

or satin at wholesale price, if you will let us have it out of your store and provide the money to pay for it."

"Would you, indeed?" he asked with a grim smile. "Well, perhaps I might as well close at once with so good and desirable an offer as that—really such an one I never had before. Come along, both of you, into the store and we will see what we can find."

He showed them the goods himself, looking gratified with the delight they manifested in gazing upon them, commenting upon their beauties, exclaiming again and again, "Oh, how lovely! What a beautiful dress might be made of that!" "Oh, that is fit for a queen!"

"Well, Ethel, which will you have?" he asked at length.

"Oh, uncle," she said, "I fear they are all too beautiful and expensive for me; something not so ——"

"Whichever you choose is to go at wholesale price, remember," he said, not allowing her to finish her sentence, "and your uncles are to settle the bill, so take whichever you prefer without reference to the price."

"Oh, uncle, you are too good and kind!" she said, her eyes filling with tears of gratitude.

"Not a bit, my dear," he returned in kindest tones. "But choose quickly, for my time is precious. How would this answer?" indicating a beautiful grosgrain silk. "I think it contains about three dress patterns and would make up prettily for you, your sister, and Dorothy here. Will it suit you both?"

"Yes, sir; oh, yes! It is only too lovely, too costly for—for me."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Dorothy, "though it may be for me, as I am to be only a bridesmaid."

"In that case you can lay it aside for use when you become a bride yourself," said Mr. Eldon. "Here, Smith," to one of the clerks, "take charge of this package and see that it is sent up to my house some time in the course of the day. Now, young ladies," leading the way to another part of the store, where he showed them some beautiful laces, saying, "Select whichever you like best for trimming the dresses and bridal veils."

"Oh, uncle, it is too much!" exclaimed

Ethel humbly. "It would be lovely, but we can do very well without such things."

"Yes," he said, "I presume the knots could be tied just as tight without any such adornment for the brides, but I must acknowledge that I shall take some pride and pleasure in seeing my nieces suitably adorned for their bridal. Nor am I going to ruin myself doing it. I have no daughters of my own, you know, so may well afford it for you and Blanche; Dorothy, also, when her turn comes."

"Thank you, uncle," laughed Dorothy, "but I am doubtful of ever wanting bridal attire; good men and true are so scarce, you know—out of the family, I mean, of course—but I am exceedingly obliged for the bridesmaid's dress you have so generously bestowed upon me."

"You are most welcome," he replied. "Will you take the lace with you? or shall I send it with the dress goods?"

"Oh, I will carry it myself if you'll let me," said Dorothy. "Blanche must see it, and I promise to take the best possible care of it."

"Very well," he returned. "We will go back to the office now, for I must give

you some money to do such shopping as must needs be done elsewhere."

"I feel as if I were really in danger of impoverishing you, uncle, dear," said Ethel as he put a roll of banknotes in her hand.

"Not at all, as you don't marry every day," he said laughingly. "In that case it might do some damage. I wish you success with your shopping, and shall be glad to see you, Blanche, and Harry too whenever you see fit to close out your business and come to make your home with us until you want to change for the western one in prospect before you. Your Aunt Sarah and I are both ready to give you a warm welcome."

"Dear uncle," Ethel said with emotion, "you could scarcely be kinder to us if we were your own daughters."

"I almost wish you were," he returned, "though that would make it all the harder to part with you for the benefit of those young men from the West. Good-by now for the present, and I wish you success with your shopping. Give my love to your sister, and tell her I hope the silk and lace will be suited to her taste."

"O Dorothy, isn't he kind? whose uncles are better than ours?" exclaimed Ethel as they walked up the street.

"Who, indeed!" said Dorothy. "Uncle George has always been good as gold to me. O Ethel, what perfectly lovely silk and lace he has given us! I shall be surprised if Blanche does not go almost wild with delight when she sees them."

"Yes, they seem too beautiful and costly for girls so poor as we are. Yet I can't help feeling greatly pleased to have them. The Landreths are wealthy, as perhaps you know, and I own I did feel a little reluctant to go among them poorly dressed, especially as a bride."

"Well, you see you won't have to, and I am sure your uncles never meant you should; they have too much family pride for that, even if they did not love the girls and Harry also, and I am sure they do."

"Yes, I know they do," said Ethel, "and I esteem their fatherly affection a very great blessing; as I should even if they were not able to help us at all."

"I do not doubt it in the least. But to change the subject—you must have a

travelling dress, and I think a certain shade of gray, with a hat and feather to match, would be the very thing."

"I agree with you," said Ethel, "and they would be pretty for Blanche too."

"Yes; but hers might be of a slightly different shade, as you don't—at least I presume you don't want to dress exactly alike and have people taking you for twins," she concluded laughingly.

"No, not exactly, except in our wedding dresses," returned Ethel with a smile. "But if we choose, we can have them made up a little differently; the way of putting on the lace might be different if nothing else."

"Yes, and that will be quite enough difference to prevent you or anybody else from mistaking one for the other or thinking you a pair of twins. I think you ought each to have a handsome black silk too, and some pretty home and morning dresses. But fortunately we don't need to purchase, or even to decide on, everything to-day."

"No, we don't, and it is well, for I want to consult my sister first. She has

as much right as I to decide these questions."

"I agree with you," said Dorothy, "but you are better than some sisters or you wouldn't be so ready to own it; some would say, 'I'm the eldest, and things ought all to be as I want them.'"

"Blanche always wants me to have my own things exactly as I want them, and reserves the same privilege for herself, which I think is the better way; for what is becoming to one is not always equally so to the other."

"No, your complexions are different, but both beautiful. I have never been able to decide which was the prettier, and would be only too thankful to exchange with either of you," said Dorothy in her merry tones.

"O Dorothy, how can you say that?" exclaimed Ethel. "I call you very pretty; you are not fair, but your skin is so smooth and soft, and you have such a lovely bright color in your cheeks, such large handsome eyes with long, silky lashes that curl so prettily, such beautiful teeth and——"

"Oh, stop, stop, you little flatterer!"

exclaimed Dorothy. "You'll have me as vain as a peacock, which will entirely spoil any pretensions to beauty that I may be supposed to have. Ah, let us go in here. They have the loveliest dress goods, and I dare say we can find the very shade of gray cloth wanted for your travelling suit."

Several hours were spent in shopping; then they returned to Ethel's little home laden with parcels, though the heavier bundles had all been left to be sent, either there or to Mr. George Eldon's.

"Oh, I am glad to see you!" cried Blanche as they entered, "and though you do look tired, I know by your happy faces that you've been successful, and by the looks of your satchels that you have a good many pretty little things to show me; but dinner's just ready and I can wait till you have refreshed yourselves with food. We will all enjoy the exhibition better after that has been attended to; so come out to the dining room," and she led the way as she spoke.

"Really I don't know whether we can wait to make our important communications," said Dorothy, laying down her

satchel and removing her hat and coat. "However, Ethel, it may be the wisest plan, if we consider Blanche's good; since what we have to say and to show might destroy her appetite for this dinner, which certainly smells very nice and appetizing. I think you will discover that I have not lost, by the way, my relish for good, substantial, well-prepared food. Partaking of it will doubtless greatly assist me in abstaining from unwisely making prompt revelation concerning the doings and happenings of our late expedition—the raids we have made upon merchants, wholesale and retail."

"And the plunder you have brought off, eh?" queried Blanche sedately, but with a twinkle of fun in her eye.

"That is included, of course," returned Dorothy.

"It is not according to one's strongest inclinations—this proposed waiting," Ethel said laughingly, "but let us show how bravely we can battle against them when we feel called upon to do so. Shall I help you to some oysters, Dorothy?"

"Indeed you may, my dear girl. I am particularly fond of oysters when well

prepared, as I have always found them here, and hungry enough to eat almost anything."

"I am glad to hear it," said Blanche, "since it will tend to cause you to more highly appreciate our humble fare."

"Now don't put on any airs of mock humility, if you please, Miss Eldon," returned Dorothy. "I say this dinner is fit for a king; sufficient variety, and everything done to a turn. These oysters, this Sally Lunn, these baked potatoes are all delicious; and I never drank a better cup of coffee. So what more could any reasonable mortal ask?"

"I don't know really," returned Blanche, "except in my case—that I may be told what you two have seen, and done, and bought. Did you find our uncles in?"

"The senior partner was there in his office, the other out; so that we missed seeing him altogether. You will hear the rest after we have fully satisfied our appetites; but remember, my lady, it was not your things but Ethel's we were buying to-day. You have probably been told more than once in the course of your

short life, that older people must be attended to first, younger ones wait patiently till their turn comes."

"Yes, I remember to have been told something of the sort several times in my life," said Blanche; "but I venture to predict that I shall not hear it very often after a certain ceremony expected to be performed within the next two or three months."

"Ah, after that you will probably consider yourself a much more important personage than—such of your sex as see fit to live in single blessedness."

"Possibly," returned Blanche with an arch look and smile.

So they chatted on for some little time, then Dorothy exclaimed, "There, we are all done eating, I see, so suppose we proceed now, Ethel, to display our purchases to Blanche's astonished eyes."

"Yes," Ethel replied, "but let us carry them into the parlor so that we can be on the watch for customers while Bridget eats her dinner."

They did so and Dorothy was in her element, opening packages and displaying the contents to Blanche's delighted eyes.

"Oh, everything is just lovely!" she said, her eyes dancing with mirth. "I doubt if you could have done better even with my assistance and advice—valuable as my friends have always found them."

"Possibly not," returned Dorothy; "but wind and weather permitting, and nothing else interfering, I hope to take you out to-morrow, my little dear, and give you the opportunity to show your talent in this line. Now we have shown you everything we bought to-day except the wedding dress and its trimmings."

"Oh, did you get them? Let me see them!" cried Blanche in an eager, excited tone.

"Unfortunately we cannot show the dress, or rather dresses—for Uncle George gave us a whole piece of the loveliest white silk, enough to make three gowns—one for Ethel, one for you, and one for myself, and——"

"Oh, did he? How kind and generous!" cried Blanche half breathlessly.

"Yes, and this lace to trim them with," said Dorothy, taking the last remaining package from her satchel, adding as she

undid it, "but I can't show you the silk because it was ordered to be sent right up to his house. I dare say it's there by this time, and you can call and look at it when you will. There! what do you think of that?" throwing open her package and holding up a portion of the lace to view.

"Oh! oh! oh! it's the loveliest thing I ever saw!" was Blanche's excited exclamation. "Did you say Uncle George gave it to us! I don't see how he could afford it, for it must have cost a mint of money."

"He said we were to have it at wholesale price and take the money to pay for it from him."

"Oh!" gasped Blanche, "I hope he won't ruin himself."

"No danger, my dear; for though very, very generous he is exceedingly careful too; as a business man should be."

"Or a business woman, or any other kind of man or woman," added Ethel with a smile. "I think both our uncles are exceedingly kind to us all. I often wish it were in my power to make them some adequate return."

"Perhaps it may be some day," said Blanche; "or, if not to them, to their children."

"Yes," said Dorothy, "there are so many ups and downs in this world; perhaps I might say particularly in this country. I must go home now, girls; it won't do to leave Aunt Sarah alone all day. But see that you are ready for your turn at shopping early to-morrow morning, Blanche, if the weather is at all suitable. Better make out a list of necessary articles, so that we won't forget and spend the money on the wrong ones. By the way, girls, I shouldn't buy any more handsome dresses — except of course Blanche's travelling suit—till we see what your Uncle Albert will do to get even with his brother in that line."

"Yes, he too is exceedingly generous," said Ethel; "but I think he should remember that he has more children of his own to provide for than Uncle George has."

"Yes; and not the most economical ones in the world either," laughed Dorothy as she stood before the glass, putting on her hat. "I must go now,"

she said, picking up her satchel, "and I'll expect you bright and early in the morning, Blanche. You'd better come for me so that you can take a look at the silk for the wedding dresses."

"So I will; I want to see it, as who wouldn't if she expected to be married in it?" returned Blanche as she and Ethel went with Dorothy to the door.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THERE's Blanche now!" exclaimed Dorothy at the breakfast table the next morning, as she filled her uncle's coffee cup for the second time. "Ah, Blanche," as the door opened and the young girl walked in, "you are good in obeying orders, and I'm glad to see you."

"As we all are," said her uncle. "Come, take a seat here by my side and have a cup of coffee."

"Thank you, sir, I have been to breakfast," she said, taking the indicated seat and exchanging a morning salutation with her Cousins George and William. "And oh, uncle, I want to thank you for the lovely lace you have given me, and the beautiful dress. I know it's beautiful, though I haven't had the pleasure of seeing it yet."

"Well, you shall have that pleasure presently, when we are all done with break-

fast," he said. "I am glad you like my gift, but I expect some return for it."

"And I will be delighted to give anything in my power," she replied, smiling up into his eyes. "Please tell me in what coin you will take your pay."

"The same that Johnnie, who stayed so long at the fair, wanted to have for the fair ring he promised to bring his lady-love."

"And will you buy me a bunch of blue ribbon to tie up my bonny brown hair?" she asked with a merry look and smile.

"Not brown, Blanche, darling, it's pure gold," laughed her Cousin William.

"And gold and blue look quite as pretty together as blue and brown," remarked Dorothy.

"I'll buy you as many bunches of blue ribbon as you want and are willing to pay for in the same kind of coin," said Uncle George, laying aside the napkin he had just been using, turning toward Blanche, taking her face between his hands, and bestowing several kisses upon the rosy cheeks and red lips.

"There, uncle, you helped yourself,

but I didn't give you any," she said laughingly, as he released her, then putting her arms around his neck she returned his caresses.

"That's the right kind of coin," he said, "and I think I must spare you a few minutes of my valuable time. We are all done eating, and we will go up now to your aunt's room to say good-morning to her and show you the wedding silk; for she wants the pleasure of seeing how you like it. Come along, Dorothy, George, and Will, if you care to see what impression it makes."

All accepted the invitation and followed quickly after him and Blanche as he led her up the stairs and into Mrs. Eldon's room, where she sat in her invalid chair, looking over the morning paper. She turned toward them as they entered, saying in a pleasant tone, "Ah, good-morning, Blanche, I am glad to see you. Good-morning, my sons. Help your cousin and yourselves to seats. My dear, you are as much at home here as I am. I'm pleased that you found time to come up again before leaving for the store. Dorothy, will you please get out the

packages and let Blanche see what she thinks of the goods?"

Dorothy opened a closet door and brought out several packages done up in brown paper, handing one to her uncle. "I think you are the one to show this, sir," she said with a smile.

"Very well," he replied, and in another moment Blanche was gazing with delighted eyes upon the rich folds of the white silk intended for her wedding dress.

"Oh, I think it is the very loveliest thing I ever saw!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands in an ecstasy of admiration. "Thank you, uncle, thank you a thousand times! Oh, what a beautiful dress it will make trimmed with that lovely, lovely lace you have given Ethel and me for that purpose."

"Yes, it is very handsome, and you must have veils too," said her aunt, enjoying the sight of the young girl's pleasure almost as much as she did that of the silk. "Show her the material for them, Dorothy."

Dorothy obeyed, saying, "This is Aunt Sarah's own gift toward your trousseaus."

"Oh, auntie, thank you very much,"

cried Blanche, examining it critically, "it is just lovely, and I am sure will make up beautifully."

"I am glad you like it," Mrs. Eldon said with a gratified look.

"And these two dress patterns, of different shades of gray silk, are from Uncle Albert," remarked Dorothy, opening another package. "He thought you would not want to be always dressed exactly alike, and says you are to decide for yourselves which shall have which."

"Ethel, as the eldest, should be the one to settle that question," said Blanche. "I think them both so beautiful that I shall not care which is left for me. Oh, how kind in Uncle Albert to give them to us!"

"And here is enough handsome black silk to make a dress for each of you," continued Dorothy, opening still another package and displaying its contents. "It is Aunt Augusta's wedding gift."

"I—I am almost overwhelmed!" cried Blanche, scarcely able to speak from emotion. "I who never before had even one perfectly new silk dress! Oh, Uncle George, I am afraid you and Uncle Albert

will ruin yourselves doing so much for us!"

"I have no great apprehensions of that, my little girl," he returned with a fatherly smile. "You are the only nieces we have to provide for—except Dorothy here for me, and I don't mean to let her go for a good while yet," smiling affectionately upon her; "so it would be a sad pity if we couldn't open our hearts enough to give you a few wedding clothes. But I must go now, and I think it would be well for you and Dorothy to start out pretty soon to attend to that important shopping which I hear you have on hand."

With that the three gentlemen withdrew from the room, and after a few minutes' chat with their aunt about the purchases to be made that morning, Dorothy and Blanche started out also.

They returned to Ethel at dinner time to report as good success with their shopping as hers of the previous day. Blanche had bought a gray travelling dress of a different shade from that of her sister, a hat and gloves to match it, besides various smaller articles needed to complete her trousseau, and Ethel admired and

approved to the entire satisfaction of the purchasers.

"Now," said Dorothy, "I think we need do very little, if any more, shopping for some weeks, when the spring fashions have come out; but there is plenty of sewing connected with what we have already bought to keep us all three busy. How I wish you were ready to come to us at once, so that we could get fairly to work immediately."

"Dorothy, how very kind you are," said Ethel, giving her a bright look and smile. "I doubt if many girls in your place would think it any concern of theirs whether our sewing was done in season or not, or offer us any assistance with it."

"Ah, but you see I am naturally fond of such doings as you have on hand at present," laughed Dorothy. "Now, can't you decide to close out earlier than you have been intending to—say in two or three weeks, if not sooner? I know perfectly well that aunt and uncle would be delighted to have you come to them so much sooner than you have intended, to say nothing of the boys and the girl Dorothy."

"Then perhaps you may be glad to hear of something that occurred this morning while you two were shopping. A woman called in to say that, hearing I was going to give up the house this spring, she would like to look at it with a view to taking it. So I took her over it from attic to cellar. She seemed to think it would exactly suit her, and if it would not inconvenience me to move out sooner than I had intended—say in a week or two—she would be very glad to take it off my hands, buying the fixtures, most of the furniture, and the goods also—as she means to keep the same kind of stock—and settling for the rent I should have to pay the landlord if I had stayed on as long as I had intended."

"Oh, delightful!" cried Dorothy. "I hope you closed with the offer at once?"

"No, not exactly," replied Ethel, smiling at Dorothy's earnestness, "but I told her I would give her my answer to-morrow or next day. I wanted time you see to consult my uncles, and to make sure I should not inconvenience anybody by accepting the invitation from Uncle

George and Aunt Sarah so much earlier than they and we had expected."

"I can assure you you needn't hesitate one minute about that," returned Dorothy. "Suppose you come up and talk with Aunt Sarah and the uncles this evening and have it settled. Then you can see some pretty things we were showing Blanche this morning."

"Oh, yes, Ethel; some lovely gifts to us from Uncle Albert and the two aunts."

"Oh, hush!" cried Dorothy, "don't tell what they are, but let her be surprised as you were this morning."

"Why, you cruel thing! the idea of keeping her waiting so long!" exclaimed Blanche in simulated wrath.

"Oh, I can wait," laughed Ethel; "mysteries and expectations are really delightful things sometimes. Now I think of it, as we do not often have much custom in the evenings, Harry and you and I, Blanche, might go to Uncle George's after tea and talk the matter over with him and Uncle Albert; see the pretty things too, and thank them and the aunts for their gifts."

The others thought well of the plan and it was duly carried out

The uncles highly approved of the immediate closing up of Ethel's business, and the coming to their houses of both nieces and nephew without any unnecessary delay. In consequence they were all, in less than a fortnight, installed as temporary members of their Uncle George's family, the girls very busy with the necessary preparations for their approaching nuptials, and Dorothy equally so as their most kind helper.

The young lady cousins next door took a languid interest and prepared some little wedding gifts for each of the prospective brides, but that was the utmost of their helpfulness.

Busy though they were—very busy with their preparations—Ethel and Blanche managed to find time to carry on a brisk correspondence with Percy and Stuart, whose letters kept them informed of the progress made from week to week in the building of their houses and the laying out of the grounds, assuring them that they confidently hoped to have the pretty homes ready in good season for their

occupants. Their fathers, so they wrote, would give them, not the grounds and houses alone, but furniture for them also, and it was their intention to buy carpets, curtains, and parlor furniture at least, in Philadelphia when they went on for their brides. These would be sent immediately to Pleasant Plains, as their town was called, and arranged in the houses by their Aunt Annis and others of the family who intended to remain at home while the bridal party made their wedding trip, visiting various places of note in the Eastern and Middle States.

"Oh, how pleasant!" exclaimed Dorothy on hearing of these arrangements; "you can go right into your own homes just as soon as you reach the town. I should like nothing better if I were in your place."

"It suits us exactly," said Ethel.

"Aunt Sarah was saying only this morning that it was time to be preparing invitations to the wedding and sending them out," remarked Dorothy, "and she wants you girls to make out a list of the relatives and friends of the bridegrooms that are to be, who ought to receive cards,

so that she can attend to the business, which is just in her line, as she can do it sitting in her chair and with very little exertion."

"It is most kind in aunt, and we will write at once for such a list," replied Ethel, looking highly gratified; for both she and Blanche wished to show every attention to the relatives of Percy and Stuart, but had not thus far felt that they had any right to invite them, or anyone, to the house of their uncle; and he had expressed a wish to have the ceremony performed in his own parlor.

The letters were promptly written, sent by the next train for the West, and a reply containing the requested list came by the return of mail.

It gave the names of relatives only, few besides the Keiths, Aunt Wealthy Stanhope, and such of the Dinsmores as were related to Mrs. Marcia Keith, the maternal grandmother of Percy and Stuart, including, of course, those of New Jersey who had for years so kindly befriended Ethel, Blanche, and their younger brother and sister.

The girls had few friends or acquaint-

ances outside of the families of their two uncles, and desiring a quiet wedding because of their recent bereavement, none others were invited.

They were very busy with their preparations, yet had time enough to take matters easily and not be so overworked as to mar their good looks or exhaust their strength. They were almost at leisure and looking rosy and happy, when their intended partners for life walked in upon them some days before the one appointed for the important ceremony.

The arrival was not unexpected, for it had been agreed upon that they should come in good season to allow time for each young couple to make their purchases of household goods and have them shipped for Pleasant Plains before the wedding.

Some two or three days were spent most enjoyably in this fascinating work of choosing the adornments of their future homes, Dorothy sometimes accompanying them, by invitation, that they might have the benefit of her excellent taste and judgment.

In the meantime letters of acceptance

or declination, accompanied by gifts—principally of handsome jewelry or silver ware—came pouring in from the invited relatives, causing the most pleasurable excitement Ethel and Blanche had ever known.

Dorothy heartily rejoiced with and for them, fairly going into ecstasies over a diamond pin for each, from Mr. Horace Dinsmore and his father, and lovely bracelets from Mr. Travilla and his wife, the dear Cousin Elsie of whom they had often heard Mrs. Landreth speak.

These handsome gifts were accompanied by letters expressing kindly interest and the hope of making the acquaintance of the young brides at some future day, but declining to attend the wedding, as it was not convenient for any of them to leave home just at that time.

Aunt Wealthy, too, declined for the same reason, and because of her advanced years, but sent a piece of silver ware to each of the brides and a warm, even urgent invitation for a visit to her on their homeward way.

"Dear old auntie!" exclaimed Percy on reading the letter, which Ethel had

handed to him, "I think, Stuart, we should try to manage it; if our brides are willing," he added with a smiling glance at the two girls sitting near. "It will not take us very much out of our way, and would be such a gratification to her."

"With all my heart, if the ladies do not object," returned Stuart with an enquiring look at them. "I do not believe either of them would regret it, for she is, as you say, 'a dear old lady.' A very amusing one, also, at times," he added with a mirthful look.

"Oh, yes; I have heard your mother and sisters speak of her, Percy, and I should like nothing better than to pay her a little visit in her own house, and engage her to make a return, if possible," Ethel said, her eyes sparkling with pleasure at the very idea.

"I, too," exclaimed Blanche. "Oh, it would be lovely! better than going to the Eastern States, if we cannot do both."

"Oh, we can do both," said Stuart, "if we do not stay too long at any one place."

"Yes, of course, we do not expect ever to have another honeymoon," laughed

Percy. "If nobody objects, I'll write at once to Aunt Wealthy that we hope and expect to accept her invitation." A moment of silence, then Blanche said:

"I think you are safe in doing so, as we have all expressed a desire to make the visit."

"Yes; then I'll write to-night," said Percy. "Oh, by the way, I received a letter from Cousin Horace Dinsmore, junior—who is about my own age—accepting an invitation I sent him the other day to be one of our groomsmen."

"I am pleased to hear it," said Ethel. "Having heard a great deal about the family I have wanted very much to see them."

"Which I intend you shall one of these days, if I have to take you all the way down there," laughed Percy.

"Possibly you may be able to induce them to pay us a visit this coming summer or fall," said Stuart. "I own to a strong desire to see them myself; so many years having passed since there was an exchange of visits that I have no recollection of any of the family."

"I should think not," laughed Percy;

"for if I am not mistaken none of them have visited our part of the country since you were born. I was taken down there in my babyhood, but, of course, have no recollection of the circumstances, or of the relatives I saw there. But we have heard so much talk about them, and read so many of their letters, that it almost seems as if we had seen and known them."

"Yes, I believe you are right," Stuart said musingly. "I shall be pleased to make the acquaintance of Horace, junior, so am very glad he is coming. It brings up the number of our groomsmen to six—Horace, Harry Eldon, Stuart Landreth, and the three cousins of the brides—George, William, and Albert."

"And we have the same number of bridesmaids," remarked Blanche; "your sister and Percy's two, his and your cousin Mary Keith, our cousin Minnie Eldon, and Dorothy. Aunt Sarah says we must have a rehearsal to-night."

"Yes," said Stuart, "and another after Horace Dinsmore gets here, as he will to-morrow, I think."

"And we expect all our party from Pleasant Plains to be here in the city by that time," added Percy; "so that we may hope to get all the intended bridesmaids and groomsmen together for that second one."

"I think they will get in to-night," said Stuart; "and it will be well if they do, as that will give them—I mean the girls, particularly—time to rest a bit before going through the ordeal."

"The rehearsal will be scarcely an ordeal, but——" It was Blanche who spoke, but she paused without finishing her sentence, and assuming a comical expression of pretended fright and apprehension.

"The actual ceremony will?" queried Stuart laughingly.

"Yes; remembering that I have heard more than once that men are deceivers," she sighed. "Alas! if I should be mistaken in the one to whose keeping I commit my happiness."

"It would be dreadful," returned Stuart regarding her with admiring, laughing eyes, "and perhaps equally so should I be mistaken in the little woman

to whom I commit mine. But I am not afraid."

"Nor need you be, Blanche, let me assure you," said Percy. "Try to be as reasonable and trustful as Ethel, who I feel convinced is not the least afraid of me," he added with a happy little laugh, and a glance of ardent affection at his betrothed.

"Ah, who shall say that that is not because she is a brave—if not particularly bright woman?" laughed Ethel.

"I," said Percy; "you, Miss Eldon, are the only person who will be permitted to utter such a slander concerning her in my presence."

The next few days seemed taken up by a whirl of pleasurable excitement—introductions to new friends, soon to become relatives, the reception of many beautiful presents, the rehearsals of those who were to take part in the ceremony, the trimming of the house with flowers, the trying on of wedding finery, and selecting of flowers—orange blossoms—for the adornment of the brides.

There was scarcely time to think of the pain of the coming partings from brother,

uncles, and other relatives; pain it would be, yet not to be compared with that of many a young bride who must leave father, mother, home, and more than one loved brother and sister.

The wedding was a pronounced success; brides and bridesmaids looking their best—groom and groomsmen also—and each going through his or her part of the ceremony in an altogether creditable manner.

A wedding feast followed; then came the leave-takings and the scattering of the guests and the bridal party, the latter taking the cars for New York, where they spent some days in sight-seeing; from there they went on to Boston, where a week was spent visiting places in the city and its vicinity interesting from a historical point of view. Then they returned to New York, went up the Hudson on a fine steamer to West Point, where they spent a day and a night; then by boat again up to Albany, where they made but a brief halt, then took the cars for Saratoga, spent a few days there, during which they visited the battlefield—all being intensely interested in everything connected

with the struggle that had made us a nation.

Their next pause was at Niagara, where they made a brief stay to see the Falls. From there they went to Lansdale, O., to pay the promised visit to Aunt Wealthy, which would be their last halt on their homeward way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was on a lovely June morning that our bridal party arrived in Lansdale. They were met at the depot by Aunt Wealthy's nephew Mr. Harry Duncan, and driven directly to the pretty cottage which had been for so many years the home of the dear old lady. She met them on its porch with both hands outstretched in cordial greeting to the dearly loved grandnephews, and their wives of whom this was her first sight, gave them the tenderest of greetings, then led them within doors and gave them in charge to Mrs. Duncan and Mrs. Lottie Allison, who conducted them to their respective rooms and left them there to refresh themselves by the removal of the dust of travel and a change of raiment.

An excellent dinner, served in Aunt Wealthy's dining room and partaken of by all the members of the three families, followed in due season, the dear old lady

herself taking the head of the table and doing the honors as gracefully as though she had seen but half the years which had actually passed over her head.

Ethel felt strongly drawn to her and the attraction seemed mutual.

"I am greatly obliged to you, boys," Aunt Wealthy said in her sweet, silvery tones, glancing from Ethel to Blanche and back again, "for furnishing me with two such sweet and lovable grand-nieces. I only wish I could keep you and them near me without robbing our dear ones in your native town. Now if you could persuade your parents and grandparents to leave Pleasant Plains for Lansdale and you to settle here also, it would be very delightful to your old auntie."

"It would be very delightful for us to have her near at hand," returned Percy with a smile, "but surely much easier to carry her there with us, than to bring all our numerous tribe here. What do you say to the idea of joining our party when we start for home again, Aunt Wealthy?"

"Ah, no, laddie! I'm too old a fixture to be moved," returned the old lady,

shaking her head. "I am only living from day to day with the feeling that home is all ready for me in that better land and that I may at any moment hear the glad summons to go to it and the dear Master who has prepared it for me."

"And yet how very peaceful and happy you look, auntie," remarked Blanche. "Do you not dread that summons at all?"

"Oh, no, child. Why should I or anyone dread a call to go home to the Father's house on high? I can truly say I do not dread it half so much as I should the earthly journey from here to Pleasant Plains. That would cause me much weariness; the other none at all."

"I think you are to be envied, Aunt Wealthy," said Blanche. "I don't think it is altogether because you are old and weary of life either, because our dear young sister Nannette seemed as glad to go to that dear home as anybody could be."

"I hope you will tell us all about her while you are here," remarked Mrs. Duncan, with a look of interest.

"Yes," said Mrs. Allison, "and also

about your wedding, for we have heard absolutely nothing so far."

"Our mothers, and the rest at Pleasant Plains, have been too busy to write, I presume," observed Stuart; "but you shall have all the particulars you care for from us before we leave."

"Yes, you must please tell us all about it this evening when Dr. and Mrs. Prince will be in to hear it too."

"Now, Aunt Wealthy, do you know that, as usual, you have lowered my father's rank?" queried Mrs. Allison with an amused look and smile. "You will forget, you dear old soul, that he is a King—not merely a prince."

"Ah, yes; it is a sad mistake and one that I make very often, and I fear I'm too young now to hope to reform in that respect."

"Ah, well, auntie, do not be discouraged," said Mr. Duncan; "you know you are getting older every day and may hope to arrive finally at years of discretion."

"Ah, Harry, Harry, you are a sad fellow, considering that you belong to the family of such a fine young father; such an one should never think of making

game of his old auntie in that fashion," returned Miss Stanhope with affected gravity, but a twinkle of fun in her eye. Then turning to Percy, "Did Mr. Travilla and Elsie get to your wedding?" she asked.

"No, ma'am; none of the family except young Horace, who was one of our groomsmen. I own that I was disappointed, for I have a great desire to meet them all; especially Cousin Elsie. She has been here several times, has she not?"

"Yes, years ago when she was quite young—eighteen—and Mr. Travilla came after her, but was not her—yes, he was her lover, but she thought of him only as a kind of uncle. Then her father brought her again when she had found out that she cared for Mr. Torville, and engaged him to marry her. Ah, he's as pleasant a gentleman as ever you saw!"

"You were at the wedding, were you not, Aunt Wealthy?" asked Stuart.

"Yes, indeed! They wouldn't have missed me for a good deal, and from the sole of her head to the crown of her foot

she was the loveliest bride that I ever saw."

"So mother has often told me, and that she was as lovely in character as in person," said Percy.

"An assertion which no one at all acquainted with her would hesitate to confirm," said Mr. Allison. "I know her well as the daughter of my esteemed brother-in-law, Mr. Horace Dinsmore, and have known her since she was a little lass about nine years old."

"How I should like to see her!" exclaimed Blanche.

"We have photographs at home," said Stuart. "I think them lovely, but mother and the others who remember her say they do not do her justice."

"We have some very good ones here," said Aunt Wealthy, "and everyone who cares to look at them can do so."

They were leaving the table as she spoke and Blanche, speaking aside to Stuart, urged him to ask his aunt to show them the old-fashioned treasures in her parlor of which she had heard him and Percy tell.

"Yes, dearest, I will," he said with a

mirthful look. "I own to a great desire to see them myself, having heard so much about them from mother, grandma, and Aunt Mildred."

But there was no need to prefer the request, as it was to the parlor Miss Stanhope now led the way, and she was presently exhibiting with pardonable pride the old furniture that had been in the family since before her time, her grandmother's sampler framed and hanging on the wall, the embroidered chair cushions which she said were filled with that grandmother's own feathers, and were valued by herself more than their weight in gold, though much faded and somewhat worn in spite of the excellent care she had always taken of them—the old, old portraits on the walls, the cabinet of curiosities brought from over the seas by an ancestor who had been a sea captain.

All these were examined with interest, then Percy enquired for the photographs.

"Ah, they are here," replied Miss Stanhope, taking up a photographic album and handing it to him. "Let us see if you can pick out your Cousin Elsie."

"Easily," he returned, "since I have

often seen one in mother's possession;" and as he opened the album his wife, Blanche, and Stuart drew around him to gaze with eager curiosity upon the lovely face which he pronounced an excellent likeness of Mrs. Travilla, judging from those he had seen and the description of her often given him by the members of the family who knew her.

Our little bridal party spent some days at Lansdale, then urgent messages from home hurried them away. They reached Pleasant Plains about the middle of the afternoon of another lovely June day.

As they alighted from the train they were greeted most rejoicingly by their fathers and mothers—Dr. and Mrs. Landreth and Mr. and Mrs. Ormsby—each couple being conducted to a waiting carriage, and presently, when the baggage had been attended to, they were whirled away to the house of the young men's grandfather, Mr. Keith, where they found the other members of the connection waiting to greet and welcome them.

Then, after a few minutes' chat, they were conducted to their own new homes, which had been thoroughly cleaned and

furnished with the carpets, curtains, and other articles bought in Philadelphia for that purpose.

All four were filled with delight at the neat and tasteful appearance of each dwelling, and the many comforts and conveniences that had been provided through the thoughtful love and effort of parents and friends.

The grounds were prettily laid out, sodded and planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers, and presented an attractive appearance for places so new to cultivation, giving promise of great beauty in coming years ; and from porches and balconies charming views might be obtained of the surrounding country and the beautiful swiftly flowing river.

Ethel and Blanche were evidently greatly pleased, and their young husbands scarcely less so.

When all these things had been viewed and rapturously commented upon, the young couples were left to themselves, with an injunction to come over to their grandfather's again when ready for tea, as all the family were to be assembled there to rejoice together over their safe

arrival, and that those to whom the brides were strangers, as yet, might have an opportunity to make their acquaintance.

It proved a delightful family party, but as the travellers were somewhat weary with their long journey, and the watchful mothers divined that they were longing for the privacy and rest to be found in their own little homes, they proposed at an early hour that the old father should lead them all in a short service of prayer and praise, then all disperse to their several abodes, hoping to meet again on the morrow, when rested and refreshed by sleep.

They separated with kind good-nights, and a few moments later Percy and his Ethel were standing together on their own porch gazing out upon the moonlit landscape.

"What a beautiful river it is!" she said in tones tremulous with emotion, "and, oh, what a dear, lovely home you have brought me to! I had hardly hoped ever to have one so sweet and fair, or to be so loved as I firmly believe my husband loves me."

"You deserve it all, dearest," he said

with feeling; "yes, far more than I deserve the happiness of having so sweet a wife for my very own. And God grant we may live and love together here for many years, should it please Him to spare our lives."

THE END.